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A Complete Novel
J. U. Giesy

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A Novelette
of the North
Kathrene and
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rong Short Stories

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We have nothing to say about the June issue of *Adventure*, out May 3d, except merely to name here three things that will be in it, and to refer you to the last page of this issue for the other June stories. Regular readers of *Adventure* need only the following three bare notices to make them insist on getting the June issue, and we'll ask new readers to accept their judgment.

"DAN WHEELER—MANHANDLER"

A Complete Novelette

By Dr. John I. Cochrane

"GASTON OLAF"

A Three-Part Story

By Henry Oyen

"THE OCEAN-BORNE"

A Complete Novelette

By Samuel Alexander White

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

Adventure

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MAY
1916
Vol. 12
No. 1

The SIGNAL FIRE

A Complete Novel

by J·U·GIESY

Author of "Not Down on the Bill," "Pride of Race," etc.

A GROUND mist hung over the valley of the Marne that morning in September, blurring the outline of trees and low rolling hills. Off to the east the sky showed plainly the promise of the coming day in ribbons of light, which pierced the mist and set it a-tremble, breaking it here and there as an army wavers and recoils before attack, ere it rolls back in a general retirement.

Above the misty sea, in a rapidly rising crescendo, came a low steady humming, which grew and grew to a roar. A great thing of cloth and metal ribs, supporting its wide-flung wings between which its hollow body pitched forward behind the blur of its well-nigh invisible propellor, swept suddenly into sight, headed west by south like a great homing pigeon, toward Paris or perhaps merely the lines of the French.

Two men rode upon it, so swathed in leather, so hooded and goggled that one could distinguish naught of their nationality or personal appearance. Yet one versed in military affairs, particularly aeronautics, would have judged the machine as a scout of the allied forces.

Had there remained any doubt in one's mind, the rapid sequence of events, following the appearance of the great mechanical bird, would have set them at rest.

Through a lane of the wavering mist, a stretch of the valley appeared. As if the sunbeam had been a great sword, the shrouding haze rolled back, cut in twain.

Beneath the darting monoplane appeared men and horses—a troop of horsemen riding slowly forward. And they were looking upward, attracted by the drone of the swift scout of the air. They sighted it on the exact instant the mist cloud parted. Their leader whipped out a heavy German automatic and, flinging his hand upward, discharged a shot in the air. Behind him his men unslung their carbines and began firing as fast as they could pump in the shells.

Pop-pop-pop-pop! The sound of their firing drifted up to the men who rode the plane.

He at the controls acted quickly, sliding his levers. The monoplane banked sharply

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and sped off at an angle, banked again and shot back in a zigzag course. He said sharply to his companion—

"What are they—make out?"

"Ain't uhlans!" the other returned, shouting back above the roar of the motor. "Near as I could see, they got on funny-lookin' fur caps with something white on their fronts. Look like a crack troop, sir, to me."

"The devil!" exclaimed the pilot. He banked again sharply and began to turn back. "I want to make sure of that. Take the glasses and get 'em when I go over. If the Death-Head Hussars are down there it's important. See if your white spot isn't something like a skull and cross-bones."

The mist had drawn still farther back as the plane swung around. The cavalry contingent beneath it was fully revealed, and they were watching the scout ship's evolutions. As it turned, several men dismounted and knelt down, aiming their weapons upward at it from a knee rest, but reserving their fire for its nearer approach.

Like the dart of a dragon-fly, it stabbed in toward them in a clean straight rush, held so, until its driver caught a sibilant, "Skull and cross-bones it is, sir," from behind him, then swerved and shot suddenly off and up at a long-leaping slant.

Pop-pop-pop-pop-pop! The men crouched down there were firing now.

Rip! A bullet tore through a vane. *Ping!* One plunged at the body of the machine. The man who had been using the glasses dropped them and caught up a light rifle. *Whang!* His shot cracked back and downward at the rapidly dwindling horses and men.

Thud! A sound, soft, deadened, muffled, like slapping a quarter of beef with a wet cloth.

The marksman on the plane dropped his rifle. It whirled downward. He sagged forward, his head and shoulders over the edge of the car's pit. The machine lurched. He slid farther over, then entirely free. His body went twisting and spinning down toward the last vanishing wisps of the fog.

"God!" said the pilot to the empty air.

Up, up swam the plane and turned. On an even keel it darted back. The lone man in its pit fumbled a bit with something. Directly above the horsemen, his hand swung over the side. A small object hurtled earthward and exploded in a cloud of smoke to one side of the hostile troop.

"Missed 'em of course," said the pilot to himself. "Chance work from a plane—all of it. Poor old Sidney! They must have got him clean through, the way he bowled over. The Death Heads are the Prince's own. Something's in the wind, I fancy. I'll get back and report on this."

He headed the monoplane once more upon her course.

THE mist had rolled quite away now, and the whole valley lay spread out in a fleeting panorama, as he fled away on his errand. The Marne sparkled far away between its trees. Below him the trees themselves were but foreshortened patches of green. The yellow checkers of fields of stubble from whence grain had been garnered, lay flung wide across the landscape.

Here and there a cluster of houses marked a village. From a chimney, a curl of smoke wavering upward showed signs of life. It was all peaceful, quiet, under the long rays of the sun slanting across it. From a farmhouse, a few pigeons darted up toward the strange man-made rival of their prowess, and hung in a fluttering cluster beneath it as it throbbed over.

The driver shook his visored head. Looking down, one would never have thought that an army had fallen back across this country the night before, that a second in pursuit of the first would soon march across it, perhaps lay it waste, destroy its peaceful industry and life, even as one of its soldiers had destroyed the life of the other man who had ridden on the plane. Some such thought concerning the tragedy of the nations, had inspired the motion of the pilot's leather helmet.

It seemed a great pity that this region below there, caught in the backwaters of peace, should be so soon fated to be disturbed. In fact it was puzzling to know why the retreating army had apparently passed it by. One had to believe their line of retirement must have passed it on either side and closed in behind it farther to the west.

Suddenly he stiffened, leaned forward in an attitude of strained attention. The even drum of his engine had varied. His trained ear told him it was "missing."

He began a rapid manipulation of the

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spark and feed controls. Abruptly the motor missed again. His eyes darted to the gage from the fuel-tank and widened briefly back of his goggles. The register was nearly down to zero.

"That bullet!" he gritted in comprehension. "I knew it hit metal. It must have struck the tank pretty well down and most of the petrol's run out. Lord!"

His gaze swept the country before him in a hasty consideration. Without fuel he could do but one thing, and that was to come to the ground in the best place he could find.

Ahead, not so far away, in reach by a long volplane, in fact, a cluster of turrets and roofs swept toward him. There were trees about it and outlying groups of other smaller houses. Walls of cut stone joined tower to tower and united them into a whole.

The sunlight threw the whole place into a vivid relief of light and shadow, gilding the turrets and etching their still darkened sides and the shadows of the trees in purple-black lines and splotches. He noted a good-sized level space near one of the walls, not so far from a wide-open gate, nodded in instant acceptance of a suitable landing-place, and shut off the now sputtering motor.

With its drone of power deadened, the plane tilted gently and swept down in a long graceful swoop toward the selected point by the wall. It grounded lightly, slid forward on its rubber-shod wheels and stopped. The pilot climbed down, pushed back his helmet and removed his goggles. He looked around.

Standing there with his visor back, one saw that his hair was closely trimmed and brown, that his features were a long oval, straight-nosed, between blue-gray eyes, wrinkled the least bit at their outer angles, and reasonably high malar eminences, which fell away into flat cheeks and a well-set square chin. Even in its heavy aviation clothing, his figure gave the impression of resilient strength and endurance throughout its five-feet-eight of length.

He turned his eyes off to the north and east and Rheims, from which direction he had come, and let them lie on the low hills rolling up from the river bottom, swept them slowly around to the south and west and the farther hills over there, brought them back to his immediate surroundings.

He stood in an utter quiet. His appearance seemed to have passed unnoticed. The old château beside which he had alighted lay in absolute quiet. Aside from the coo of a pigéon somewhere on a roof, it might have been some fabled castle of enchantment, for any sign of life. He glanced once at the monoplane with almost an air of regret, shrugged in a final acceptance of the situation, and turned toward the gate in the wall with a quick stride.

And then, as suddenly as he had started toward it, he paused. His hand went to his head in an instinctive attempt at salutation and checked to fall back, when he found his head bare. For one pregnant moment he stood staring at a figure which had just emerged from the very gate toward which he was heading.

Always afterward he was to remember that his first impression had been of black and white and crimson, before he took more particular notice of the woman, who paused at his attempt to uncover and stood as if waiting for him to speak.

Her hair was very, very black—blue-black—and his keen eyes noted that one could see the little threads of it along her brow, sprouting by individual roots from a scalp as white and pure and clean as a virgin page of parchment. And her eyes, too, seemed black, or very dark at least. Her flesh was white, with a warm blood tint beneath its clear skin, and her lips—ah, there was the crimson!—the crimson of the heart in a rose, warm, soft, a vivid line of color in the whiteness of her skin. And she was clothed in black, a simple gown which the faint air of morning pressed gently against a slender, supple figure and line of limb, from the sleeves of which two white forearms and hands protruded.

"Good morning, mademoiselle," stammered the man of the air-ship in halting French, but with true preception of her youth and the wide eyes of its unsophistication. "Are you the châtelaine of the château upon which I have been compelled to trespass?"

The crimson of her mouth retracted, showing a line of white teeth in a slight smile.

"Yes, monsieur, if by that you mean do I live here. It is my home. I saw you come down a moment ago and determined it best to come out and discover the reason."

The man nodded.

"Permit me to introduce myself," he

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returned. "Lieut. Maurice Fitzmaurice, of the British aviation corps, on scouting duty."

The woman's smile grew more friendly.

"I, monsieur, am Jacqueline Chinault, of Château Chinault, come to offer you the hospitality of my home, in that case. Also, if you prefer, we may converse in English."

"Right-o," said Fitzmaurice. "I'm a dub at French and know it. You're awfully good to offer me hospitality and all that, but if it were a few liters of petrol, I could do with it a lot better. Still, if you could let me have a horse, or anything on which to get along——"

The smile faded from the girl's face at his words and she became serious at once. Her eyes darted to the monoplane, resting near the wall.

"But your machine——"

"Hole in the fuel tank," the lieutenant explained. "Flew over a German cavalry troop. They shot my mechanic and put a ball into the tank. The essence ran out and the motor ran down. Beastly business. I've got to get back to our lines, too, as fast as I can."

"*Back* to *our* lines?" said Mlle. Chinault tensely, growing a trifle more white than before.

Fitzmaurice nodded.

"Didn't you know? Jove, they must have passed you on either side! And—" he paused aghast. "Good Lord, Miss Chinault, your place is right between the two armies? You must get out. This is no place for a girl like you. You won't think of remaining? You ought to have gone before this. Why have you stayed on, when we were being pushed back right along?"

She was frowning slightly. One would have said she was considering some point wholly apart from his words from her expression, even though she presently made answer:

"There were several reasons for that. My father is Major Chinault. He is with the Twenty-Third Chasseurs-a-pied."

"Up on the north end," said Fitzmaurice, naming the regiment's station.

"So? I have had no word in days," she accepted. "Most of the younger men on our property left at the time of the mobilization. My father's sister and I remained here to see to the harvesting of our crops as, you may remember, was suggested at the beginning of this war. Then my aunt took ill—is still bedfast, and—" she paused also and faced him directly—"*mon Dieu*, monsieur, who would have really expected our lines to be over there?" She waved a dramatic hand to the south and west. "Your message for them is important?"

"Judge for yourself," said Fitzmaurice. "Ten kilometers back, about, I passed a troop of the Death-Head Hussars, coming this way."

Jacqueline Chinault pressed her lips together until they became a red line merely.

"So close," she said. "Monsieur, can you fix your tank? If so I can furnish you perhaps ten liters of petrol."

"Why—" Fitzmaurice's jaw dropped, then closed with a snap. "I don't know. Haven't looked. But—good Lord, girl, why didn't you say so before!"

Turning, he ran back to the aeroplane, to begin a hasty examination of the damage done by the German bullet.

Jacqueline followed more slowly, eying the monster air-craft with interest, as she approached Fitzmaurice, now poking about the empty tank with a view to seeing what could be done in the way of hasty repairs. The little frown still lingered between her eyes, slightly puckering their lids. Once she turned her head and looked off toward the eastern line of hills.

Fitzmaurice turned to her as she came up to the machine.

"All I need is a cork to plug the hole and some tape to strap it in. I have the tape. If you could get me a cork—say so big—" he held up a thumb—"I can fix it in ten minutes."

She nodded.

"I will get it, and arrange for a servant to bring out the petrol. Wait."

She turned away and went at something approaching a free-limbed run, toward the gate, to disappear inside.

"Gad!" muttered Fitzmaurice, looking after. "There's a girl for you, now. Never feazed her when I mentioned her position and the Hussars. Cool as you please. Class to her, in every word and action—and line. I picked the right spot to come down in, all right, it appears. Lucky!"

He fumbled in his pocket, produced tobacco and papers, constructed and lighted a cigarette and gazed off to the northeastern sky-line while he smoked, leaning back against the body of the plane. After a long time he spoke, muttering to himself again—

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"Beautiful you know—ripping. No business here though."

HE THREW away the cigarette and straightened. The object of his thoughts was returning promptly. She hurried to him, her face slightly flushed from her haste, and extended her hand, with several corks on its palm.

"I—brought all I could find in a hurry," she declared. "Pierre Giroux and his grandson are getting the petrol."

Fitzmaurice bent to select a cork. He noted the hand which held them was trembling slightly; that her breast was rising and falling deeply beneath the tissue of the black gown. At another time he would have taken time to speak to her further, but time pressed if he was to get on his way.

He took one of the corks without a word and turned quickly to climb up and fit it into the hole in the tank, driving it in firmly with a wrench, before he began pressing bits of yellow soap from his kit-box carefully around its edges. Taking a roll of electrician's tape, he began next, winding it carefully over the cork and the soap and around and around the tank itself, to bind all securely in place.

"There!" he exclaimed at the end. "If only France could plug up the German advance as neatly!"

While he worked, the girl had stood by in an equal silence, but now she took up the word.

"France," she cried softly. "France will, monsieur. France must." Abruptly her red lips quivered. "Oh, my France!" She caught herself sharply. "You are ready for the petrol, monsieur?"

Fitzmaurice smiled in satisfaction.

"All ready, mademoiselle."

"It comes then."

Fitzmaurice turned his head. An old man and a boy were approaching. One carried a large can, the other a funnel. The one was bent and grizzled, with the wrinkled peasant features of a painting of type. The other was young, slender, bare-footed, with a face childishly alert.

"Pierre Giroux," said Jacqueline Chinault at his elbow. "His son, young Pierre, has gone with the army. Little Jean there is his child—an orphan. Both helped harvest the crops with the women."

The boy and the man came forward. Fitzmaurice took the funnel and set it in place, lifted the can and poured the precious fuel into the plugged tank, screwed the cover fast and set the empty can back on the ground.

"I sha'n't try to thank you for all this," he said, turning back to Mlle. Chinault. "I think maybe the best thing I can say to you is just: It is for France." He leaned over and tested his spark, nodded, straightened and began drawing his helmet into place. "But before I go—just a word about you. You have some way of leaving here, I suppose, and if you'll take my advice, you'll do it without delay. Those chaps back there won't take very long to push forward, and they shouldn't find you here. I don't believe they're guilty of half the things put on them, but just the same there are rotters in every army, and there's no use of your taking chances."

"My aunt is really too ill to be moved," said the girl. Fitzmaurice noticed that her lips were again pressing themselves tight as he spoke in advice. "I have heard they do not act badly to those who offer no resistance. Here we could offer none if we desired. There are only peasant women and some old men and boys."

Fitzmaurice climbed to his seat. He shook his head. An immense dissatisfaction filled him at leaving this woman here, practically alone and unprotected.

"Still—I wouldn't chance it—really," he advised once more. "You're—pardon me, it sounds bald I know—but you're too beautiful a girl to take such a chance. If you have petrol, you must have a car or something of the sort. Surely your aunt could be taken out in that, under the conditions."

Jacqueline Chinault smiled rather oddly he thought.

"Oh, yes—yes—we have a motor," she said with some hesitation.

Pierre Giroux threw up his hands.

"But, mademoiselle — the petrol!" he cried.

"Pierre!" The girl's tone snapped sharp in command.

Fitzmaurice turned his eyes from her face to that of the old peasant.

"What about the petrol, Pierre?" he demanded.

It appeared there was something here he did not understand, but which was plain to the man and the girl, and which the latter did not intend to have discussed.

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The old man fidgeted with downcast eyes. It was the lad who spoke.

"It's in there." He pointed toward the fuel tank. "We took it out of the motor—all of it, monsieur."

Comprehension of that queer smile and all it involved came to Fitzmaurice in a flash. This then was the reason for her reticence in discussing her own situation. She had made a choice, perhaps vital to herself and her welfare, without a word or a sign, The thing gripped him in irresistible fashion, even while he made a choice of his own.

He turned his eyes back to her face. There was something like accusation in their glance.

"You gave it to me—all of it," he said hoarsely. "You were going to let me go away, and stay here with no means of escape to face whatever might come. Well, you won't. We'll drain it out again and I'll take the motor and yourself and your aunt, and we'll get away in that."

He made as if to climb down from the plane.

Jacqueline flushed before the glowing challenge of his glance. The color stained her white flesh briefly, but as he moved, she went suddenly pale. Her eyes flashed back into his. Her lips opened.

"Wait!" she cried, in hurried protest. "I did nothing for you. As you yourself said, it was for France. Keep it. Use it for France. The motor would break down inside the first kilometer quite likely. What then? It is but an old thing left here weeks ago because it was not good enough for military service. Your mission is urgent, and what you propose would mean more delay. There has been enough of that. It is well over an hour since you came down. I made up my mind before I spoke of the petrol in the first place. France needed it. I am a daughter of France. I gave it to her. Your message is of far more importance to France than my danger, and you are neglecting your duty to her. Go, monsieur Fitzmaurice. I—I command it."

"And leave you here—unprotected? Good Lord! I can't do a thing like that, you know. Look here. They shot my mechanician. Get in here and let me take you to a place of safety." Fitzmaurice was thinking swiftly.

The girl was breathing quickly.

"And leave my father's sister — ill — alone?" she flung out. "Monsieur is wrong if he thinks me a coward."

Inwardly Fitzmaurice groaned as he met her flashing eyes and watched the panting of her breathing.

"Monsieur thinks you beautiful and overly brave," he said shortly. "Really, Mlle. Chinault, you don't fully realize——"

"Look!" cried Pierre Giroux, breaking suddenly in as he lifted a hand and pointed north and east.

A horseman showed on the skyline. He wore a strange bushy cap as he sat his horse and examined the country below and beneath him. In dark silhouette, the two by the monoplane saw him lean forward in the saddle staring toward them, straighten and wave an arm to the rear.

"Good Lord! A hussar!" said Fitzmaurice tensely. "One of those I passed, most likely. Mademoiselle, for God's sake get in here and go with me! They won't injure your aunt. They don't bother the sick."

She shook her head. He saw she was very pale, however.

"I am a soldier's daughter, lieutenant. I —I am not afraid."

"If I stay, I could do you no good—maybe I would do you harm, being what I am," said Fitzmaurice in sick defeat before her determination.

She smiled the least bit in the world.

"Go then, monsieur. Already I have said it."

Fitzmaurice's face was a queer sallow, as he snapped his goggles into place.

"If they don't stop here, I'll—I'll try and come back, to see that you're all right," he suggested. "Can your man there spin my propeller and put me up?"

Pop! The sound cracked out sharply on the morning. A bullet droned past and struck the wall beyond them in a little puff of powdered stone.

Fitzmaurice turned his head in the direction of the shot. More horsemen had appeared. They were racing their horses down the slope of the hills, firing as they came. *Pop-pop-pop!* their shots rang out.

The aviator turned back.

"Go inside—do anything they say—give them anything they want," he directed his companion. "If they ask about me, tell them I came down to fix something about my engine, and made your man help me. Pierre," he ordered the cringing peasant, now panic-stricken by the shots and the

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plunging of bullets. "Grab that thing in front there and twist it around!"

The girl herself leaped forward.

"Never mind, Pierre." She brushed him aside. "Set your spark, monsieur. I have seen it done. Are you ready?"

Fitzmaurice nodded. It had all come to seem something in a dream—the sound of the shots, the little spurts of dust kicked up by the bullets, the old man and the boy, and the girl he had never seen till an hour ago, flaming there now at the nose of the great gnome engine, her white hands gripping the blades of the propeller, her red lips parted, her eyes wide, dilated into pools of dark excitement.

He set up his spark and opened the throttle. He saw the grip of the girl's hands tighten on the ash blades. He saw her lips come together over her breath, saw her bust rise, saw her set herself for the effort. Then every muscle in her splendid supple body seemed to contract. She racked the propeller once, twice, thrice, stiffened in a final exertion of all her strength and spun it around.

Br-r-r-r—! The engine caught on. Jacqueline sprang back out of danger. The monoplane trundled forward, tilted, rose faster and faster—a great thing climbing a long hill of air.

Pop-pop-pop! The shots of the racing horsemen snapped and crackled, seeking to wound it, reach its metal vitals and bring it back to ground.

Still it mounted, circled. From its side Fitzmaurice waved a hand.

Pop-pop! The horsemen were very close now to the château. On the open space by the wall, Jacqueline Chinault gave them little attention. With a hand pressed to her breast, she was watching the dwindling flight of the plane.

"For France," she repeated softly.

Pierre Giroux plucked at her sleeve.

"Mademoiselle, let us get inside."

She turned and walked to the gate and through it. Her eyes swept the space within its walls. It was her home, had always been her home. What would they do to it—those men riding toward it—to it and her. She heaved a great sigh and clenched her hands at her sides.

"For France," she whispered again to herself.

From somewhere beyond the horizon, came a low, growling rumble, like the sound of distant thunder, rolling, dull, heavy, full of menace, under the cloudless sky.

II

"THE gate! Mademoiselle—I shall close it?" said Pierre in his aged quaver.

"But certainly not. What good could it possibly accomplish? Don't be foolish, Pierre." She brought herself back from her thoughts to answer his suggestion.

"We could fail to respond to a summons," insinuated the ancient. "Perhaps *le bon Dieu* would make them think the château deserted and so cause them to ride on."

Jacqueline shook her head.

"Not they. They saw us no doubt. Besides they would investigate none the less. They leave nothing to chance or uninspected behind them. They are thorough. Would we were more so."

"They arrive!" shouted Jean from the gate where he had lingered. He scampered toward his grandfather and his mistress, his small face divided between fear and excitement. "They arrive," he panted. "They have fur hats with a skull upon them. There are a million of them—maybe more!"

A voice spoke gruffly without the gate. Followed the sound of stamping hoofs and a rattle of metal. The head of a single horse appeared under the arch of the portal, and was followed by another. Two men rode in on fretting mounts, whose steel shoes rang on the stone flags of the court as they entered. The one in advance was large, florid, tanned to a brick red against which his military mustache showed almost yellow. Behind him his companion sat his horse with the stock of a carbine against his thigh, his fingers gripping it at the breech, ready for instant use.

The two rode forward without haste or pause, toward the woman and the trembling old man and the boy. Not until they confronted one another directly, did they make sign or pause; then the leader drew his mount to a halt and swung it to one side.

"What place is this?" he demanded in heavy French, without any other salutation.

"The Château Chinault," Jacqueline told him.

"So. In your charge or another's?"

"In mine, as it happens."

"Then, in the name of my commander, I

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demand its surrender by you to me, Captain Steinwald."

Jacqueline's smile held a touch of sarcasm as she made answer:

"The demand will be complied with, my Captain. The garrison finds itself unable to resist." Her hand indicated Pierre and little Jean.

"So. That is well then." Apparently the captain missed entirely her verbal shaft. "We will require food and fodder for the horses and whatever else may occur as the need arises. You will furnish it upon demand without question, to avoid anything unpleasant. What is the matter with that?" he demanded, pointing to the still trembling Pierre.

"I have a notion that he is frightened," said Jacqueline Chinault. "You have a brusk way about you, Captain, and there have been stories—oh, such stories! He is but a peasant. Can one blame him for hearing the stories?"

"Huh!" Steinwald grunted, twitching his yellow mustache. He swung to the man behind him. "We stop here, you. Tell the troop to dismount and remain at ease, then return."

The trooper saluted, wheeled with a flapping of his black dolman and cantered back through the gate. More jingling of accouterments came from beyond the wall.

The captain dismounted and turned on Pierre.

"Take my horse, thou," he directed. "See to it that he is fed and groomed. See that fodder is furnished for the horses of the troop. And try no tricks. If so much as a hair is out of place on my charger—there are bullets in our guns to match the stories. So then begone."

The trooper clattered back, saluting. Steinwald gave a fresh order.

"Go with this old rascal who will show you where to get fodder. Direct the men to feed. We wait until the rest of the squadron comes up. That is all." He swung back to the girl at his side. "But there is a matter to discuss with you, young woman. I should prefer to do it over some of the really decent wine you people make."

Jacqueline bowed. Pierre had gone with the captain's horse and the trooper. She turned to lead the officer up a low line of steps to a door giving upon the courtyard, and through that into a hall. He followed, with a clank of heavy boots on the stone, as different from the lightness of her own free-limbed step, as their two races were from each other.

Presently she turned into a large room, raftered and wainscoted from ceiling to floor in age-darkened oak, against which hung long tapestry panels and some paintings in oil. In the center of the floor stood a great table also of oak, in the midst of a tapestry rug. Jacqueline advanced to the end of this, facing a huge fireplace in one end of the room, and set her foot over a concealed signal button, close to one leg.

Meanwhile Steinwald had thrown himself into a large chair, which he drew up to the table, casting his busby and gantlets upon the bare top.

The door at the farther end of the room opened and a middle-aged woman appeared and stood waiting.

"I rang for you Marthe," said her mistress. "The officer desires a glass of wine."

Steinwald turned his close-cropped head in the servant's direction.

"A bottle of wine, woman," he amended.

"A bottle of wine, Marthe," her mistress directed, and sat down opposite the captain. "I think you said you had something to speak about to me?"

"Yes." The captain was lighting a cigar. Now he tossed the match on the floor and leaned back at his ease. "As we arrived, an aeroplane left here and flew south and west."

"Certainly," said Mlle. Chinault. "What of it?"

"That is what I would know," grunted the captain. "What of it? Who was it? Where was he going? This morning we fired at an aeroplane and a man fell out. But he was dead. He could tell nothing. This looked like the same machine."

"It was," Jacqueline replied. "But I don't know where he was going. He came down here to fix something about his engine. He mentioned your firing upon him. I never saw him before."

"But—you helped him to get away. We saw you. Those who help the enemies of the Emperor court trouble and reprisal, young woman."

"He was a soldier of my people," said Jacqueline simply, yet with a strange little pulse beginning to beat low down in the white of her throat. "Your Emperor is not mine."

"Not yet," the captain retorted. "Well,

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what else did he say, besides that we hit him?"

"He told me to offer no resistance to any demands you might make."

For the first time the captain seemed to feel amusement. He smiled slightly.

"So? It would appear that your people are learning discretion then, Mademoiselle. They begin to feel how useless it is to resist us. It is to be hoped it may continue. It will save us some annoyance and so much of suffering to them. But—why have you stayed here—a pretty girl like you?" His small eyes stared into her face.

Jacqueline shrugged, and diverted her gaze.

"It is my home. I am a soldier's daughter."

"So?" Steinwald opened his eyes, and dropped his chin to go on staring.

"Yes. My father is Major Chinault. Some of your people met him in Belgium."

Steinwald chuckled.

"In Belgium is he not now," he declared with heavy humor. "Rather should you have said that he met some of my people. But no matter. Do what the air-man said—be a good little girl, and there will be no trouble. We do not wish to damage this section of the country greatly. It is good grape lands. We intend to grow them extensively here, when peace again comes."

"You have a far vision," murmured the girl as he paused.

Steinwald nodded.

"Yes—we look ahead. There is more to our marching song '*Deutschland über alles*' than sound. All has been planned by those above us. Belgium already we have. Soon will it be so with France. It is as good as finished. Then shall we punish those others to the east. Ah, here is the wine!"

Marthe came in with a tray, two glasses and a bottle. Steinwald rose heavily to his feet and inspected the latter.

"You have loosened the cork," he said scowling. "Bring another. Or no—wait."

He seized a glass and poured it full of the liquid.

"Drink," he commanded, holding it forth to Jacqueline across the table.

She took it bowing, but with a spark beginning to glow deep in her eyes.

"You are gallant," she made comment, and forced a smile.

"I am cautious," Steinwald grunted and returned to his chair.

Jacqueline's red lips parted.

"And you suspect poison? Captain, have you worn the death head so long on your busby that you fear some one will seek to place poison within you? I believe there is a connection with the symbol."

Steinwald shrugged.

"It is the symbol of death to those who oppose it. Drink," he said gruffly.

"Do you intend to deny your thirst until you see how it affects me?" the girl ran on, in the grip of a whimsical mood which delighted in flaunting the boorish trooper. "Captain you must have wonderful control. Let me send for another bottle."

Steinwald leaned forward.

"*Ach!* Then you are afraid," he rumbled. "Drink. It is an order."

"I obey it." Her lips curled. "Behold, Captain. To valor!"

She raised the glass and drank.

THE Captain drew his watch. Jacqueline set her glass back on the table. The German puffed at his cigar. Five minutes passed in silence.

"I do not feel at all strange," said Mlle. Chinault at the end of that time. "Do you suppose it is failing to work?" There was a quiver of something like contempt in her tones.

Steinwald shook his head shortly.

"Too soon," he declared. "It must absorb somewhat from the stomach."

He sat on. At length he snapped his watch.

"So. It is now ten minutes. It is then nothing, but always is it best to be safe."

He took up the bottle, filled a glass and drank it off, filled it again, and poured its contents down his throat, refilled it and drained half of the third portion; set it down.

"Good wine, very good wine. After the war this country should yield excellent grapes. It is receiving so much good manuring. *Ach*, yes! After the war, we shall make even better champagne than this."

Jacqueline pressed her lips together. That last thrust from this man who tested his drinks on a woman's body, was almost more than her spirit could endure. She found her eyes damp with tears, half of rage, half of sorrow. She knew how richly the soil had been fertilized with the blood and bodies of her country's bravest manhood. She clenched her hands and sprang up, every nerve a-quiver.

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"Never!" she cried. "*Mon Dieu*, never! Not while a son of France can hold a rifle. The end is not so near as you fancy, Captain Steinwald. It is not so nearly finished as you think. Just because those above you say it must be, is no sign that it will come to pass. While a good God rules, France shall not be blotted out by all your men and cannon. You have wounded France, but you haven't reached her heart. It still beats as it always has beat. I, a woman of France tell you. You had best be as cautious with wounded France, as you were with France's wine just now. You will raise grapes in the Champagne Country, only when France is dead."

Steinwald sat silent before the flaming woman, and the storm of patriotic fury he had aroused. His small eyes blinked slowly. His chin still rested on the collar of his tunic.

But by degrees his face began to flush darkly. He began to sense that she was speaking treason at least to his ears—to question the final triumph of his ruler and arms. He began to rumble deeply in his heavy throat, like a beast growling. His hand tightened on the arm of his chair.

"Stop!" he thundered of a sudden. "To speak so is forbidden."

He half rose and paused abruptly as the sound of heavy footsteps came from the hall.

A rap fell on the door of the room. To Jacqueline it seemed that the one seeking admission must have struck the panels with the hilt of a saber, so sharp was the sound.

Steinwald crossed to the door and wrenched it open to display a soldier standing stiffly with his hand in salute at his busby, his heels together, his figure utterly rigid.

"Herr," the man parroted stiffly, "the Herr Lieutenant bids me inform you that we have discovered a bucket and funnel at the spot from which the aeroplane rose as we approached. Both smell strongly of petrol."

Jacqueline understood. In a sick wave of comprehension she remembered that she had forgotten all about the bucket and funnel when Fitzmaurice had made his escape, and left them where he had set them after pouring the petrol into the tank. And they had been found there!

Her story about fixing the engine was disproven. What would they do? She waited, with a strange, breathless feeling seeming to creep up and chain her in a sort of dreadful fascination. She heard Steinwald's voice.

"So!" He turned back upon her. His yellow mustache rose in a snarling grimace. "You lied then to me young woman. You furnished petrol to that airman. Do not deny it. To do so is useless."

Some of the heat of her recent defiance still clung to her, despite this sudden discovery of the assistance rendered by her to Fitzmaurice.

"What of it?" she said shortly.

"He was an enemy," said Steinwald. "You gave him help. That is forbidden—to help an enemy of ours."

"He was not an enemy of mine. He was a friend of my people," she retorted. "You had not yet occupied the château."

"He was our quarry," growled Steinwald. "We had shot him down."

He swung back to the stolid trooper still standing in his flat-handed salute.

"Go. Say to the Herr Lieutenant, that I commend his attention. Say that I direct him to at once place under arrest the old man and the boy who went with Corporal Weiss to get fodder. Direct him to send men to the cottages below here and inform the people of the arrest, and command them to refrain from all hostile acts, on pain of reprisal and the instant death of the man and the boy, and the burning of this château."

The soldier's hand fell. He turned away. His black dolman swung behind him. Steinwald approached the table to pick up his gantlets and busby. He eyed the girl who stood now pale and silent, shaken and dismayed somewhat by what she had heard.

"As for you," he resumed, "get you above stairs and remain there unless sent for. While you and yours offer quiet submission you will not be injured. In the hall shall a sentry be posted. See that his coming finds you not here."

He strode clanking to the door and vanished, leaving her suddenly alone.

Jacqueline sighed. Her hands fell limply to her sides. She stood with bowed head in the grip of reaction from the events through which she had passed. Something like unreasoning horror seized her for the moment. This was war—to be over run, commanded, threatened, driven about—the whole tenor of one's life set aside, her liberty curtailed, her people arrested and held hostage for her good behavior. She shivered. Again

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the low rumble as of far-off thunder rolled slowly through the room—guns—cannon!

She lifted her head sharply. Far away as it seemed through the heavy walls of the house, another sound had drifted to her—the fanfare of a bugle. Again she shivered from an inward cold.

She heard the door to the courtyard thrown open. Steps came toward the room where she was standing. A second trooper appeared at the door. Without the least expression on his heavy face, he waved her out in a wide-armed gesture.

"Above stairs," he said in German. "It is ordered." And he stood, waiting.

She might not resist. The young Englishman who had wanted to help her had told her not to think of any such course. Throwing up her head proudly, she walked past the stolid sentry in his dark dress and black cape and busby, where gleamed the symbol of death itself.

He turned and followed to take post just inside the courtyard door, and throw his short cavalry weapon to port across his chest as he took his position. Save for his words of command he gave her no further attention.

She began the ascent of the stairs. Despite the fact that but for the crowding events of the morning she should long since have paid her daily devoirs to her father's sister, she went slowly. She felt wholly tired. The weight of her limbs, as she lifted one after another, became a conscious effort unlike her normal elastic gait. The clog of defeat dragged at her heels numbing heart and body. That bugle was a German trumpet crying the advance of her country's foes—the march of the invader across the bleeding body of France. Ah, France!

Abruptly her lips quivered and her breath caught in a dry sob. She pressed a hand to her heart as she reached the top of the stairs.

There was a room in the eastern end of the château, up there, where the first sunray of morning must always herald the newborn day. It was one set apart years ago for Madame St. Die, when that little lady, newly widowed, had come to care for her brother's orphaned child. Always Jacqueline thought of it as a room both of atmospheric and spiritual brightness, where she had been tended through childhood and youth to the door of mature life where she now stood. She made her way to it and tapped gently for admittance.

"Come in, child, come in," cried her aunt's voice.

JACQUELINE entered. The dark bright eyes of a little woman with graying hair and a high-nosed, patrician face, turned to meet her in silent question.

By an effort the invalid raised herself to a sitting posture in her bed and motioned her niece to approach. There was little of the emotional ever about Madame St. Die, widow of a major in the French service, brother of a major also.

"So the Prussians are upon us?" she said quite calmly. "Marthe was up a bit ago and told me. It was in '70 they came before. I had hardly looked for them to return again during my life. Control yourself, my dear. It will pass. In '70 I was a girl myself as thou art now, and my heart bled then for France, as your face tells me yours bleeds today. Come—sit down beside me and tell me all that has happened."

Somewhat soothed by the words of the elder woman, Jacqueline seated herself on the edge of the bed and related in detail what had occurred.

Her aunt smiled slightly at the end.

"Your action in regard to the petrol was foolish, *ma petite*. But no matter. At your age I doubt not I should have done the same. Now all we can do is give quiet submission. Still—you might have thought to hide that bucket and funnel."

Again the fanfare of a bugle rang out, nearer, clearer.

"Be thou my eyes," said Madame St. Die. "Go to the window and tell me what you see."

Again the girl shivered but made no answer. Rising, she crossed the room to comply with the request.

The countryside so peaceful in the early morning was filled with a grim panoply now. Pouring across it, dark, sinister, came rank after rank of horsemen, dark-clad like those first who had come to disrupt the peaceful life of the château. Rank following rank they pressed ahead with the precision of some mighty engine of menace. Their black dolmans flapped in the air of the morning. The white death's head gleamed above their heavy faces. The little pennons fluttered above them from long

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staffs. The sunlight glinted dully from their service scabbards, stained brown to disguise their metallic luster, and the barrels of their short carbines, and shone on the whipping guidons.

Without haste or confusion they came onward, a single giant figure before them. And after him two, side by side, and after them five abreast, and then the mighty, ground-shaking mass of the squadron.

Nor were they all. Beyond them on either side, other groups of horsemen moved in steady advance. Behind each group trailed a wheeled something, from between whose wheels came now and then a dim metallic refraction. Guns! The artillery of the hussar support! They were pressing on at the heels of the army of France as they had pressed for days, without material check—a wave of hostile portent which swept resistance back or aside, or, finding it stubborn, rolled up and up and over it in a flood of men and weapons, and again pressed on.

And behind hussars and guns, long lines of gray—men on foot, marching forward and down, the light flashing now and then from the point of a helmet, the barrel of a gun—the serried might of the German, heavy, methodical as clock-work, mighty, pressing on. Like the accompaniment of their coming, once more she heard the grumble of far guns.

In a voice of choked emotion, she recounted it all to the woman on the bed.

"Courage," said Madame St. Die. "There will be another story, Jacqueline, my little flower. This was expected. Thy father and I have discussed it, all many a time."

The girl's eyes widened. Her lips parted.

"Expected? This invasion—defeat—capture?" She gasped the words rather than spoke them in any connected fashion.

"But indeed, yes. What would you? France has known always that some day the German would bring the war to her. France knew Germany was ready as France could never be ready—as her people would never prepare until the hour itself made demand. In France the law is the people. In Germany there is but one law, and that the law of one man and his advisers. By one way and another they have educated their people to want war—have nursed the spirit of it in their breasts, until the people themselves have cried their Emperor on. So sure were they of the final step, that they have even spoken among their official circles of the time when this war should come as 'The Day.' France knew, but even so she hoped to avert it, as she has averted it at least five times in the last ten years. And France wanted to prepare. Why else the new military service laws of two years ago? It was a step toward preparing for what had to come. And now that the need arises, the people of France will respond—even though Paris fall, still will France fight the invader."

"And surely the English will help us," Jacqueline cried. "England, too, is threatened the same as France. The man in the aeroplane was English. He was fighting for France already. He was very brave, and strong, and he was very—nice."

"Ah, youth!" said her aunt, without apparent relevance to the subject. "Yes, the English will help us—must help us as you say—are doing so already, not only with men and guns, but with morale. France will wish to show England how she can fight. And England indeed is threatened no less than we. Both nations must fight for their national existence this time, my child. Well, what else do you see?"

"Motors and motorcycles," Jacqueline told her. "One car is a huge thing. I suppose, perhaps, the commander rides in that. And the couriers—the despatch-bearers ride on the motorcycles, of course. They say they can make sixty miles an hour."

"Imagine going to war in a motor," said the woman on the bed. "In '70 our officers did not so. What else, my dear?"

"Behind the column, wagons and trucks and funny-looking things with smoke pouring from pipes as they come forward. I think the last must be their field kitchens, of which we have heard so much."

"Our men cooked their meals over splinters in '70," declared the invalid behind her. "*Mon Dieu*, but times have changed!"

Jacqueline made no direct answer. Speaking quickly, she began to describe what was going on outside the château wall.

"The motor is coming forward swiftly now—the big one. That Steinwald of whom I told you, and a couple of other officers are standing by the gate as stiff as sticks. Now the motor has stopped, and another officer has dismounted and is opening its door, and —ah, what seems a personage is getting out of the car!

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"He seems a fairly young man, so far as I can determine. He has a long, aristocratic face, a mustache and broad shoulders, and a decided air about him. That is all I can see, except that he is handsomely uniformed indeed. Now everybody is saluting and he is walking toward Steinwald. Now he is speaking to him. Now he has signed two officers and is speaking to them. They have turned away, riding back along the column. *Mon Dieu!* If they stop here, where will they all get hay for their horses, and what will we have left for our cows for the Winter?"

"Can we help it?" retorted her aunt. "Perhaps they will leave nothing behind them which needs hay to eat. Be that as it may, we can only submit, we women, and wait. Long ago your father told me of a plan should this very thing happen. Those who love France foresaw what might come to pass. They planned how to meet it. Therefore let not a few horses and guns disturb you. Youth is impatient, but age learns how to wait."

"They are coming inside now," said the girl at the window. "There is a group of officers in very brilliant uniforms about the man from the motor. That pig of a Steinwald is leading the way. They are passing in at the gate and the cavalry is dismounting."

She turned to come back to the bed and resume her seat on its edge. Her attitude was one of brooding. A dull agony of impotence was in her heart—a heavy, useless resentment of this invasion of her country and her home, too deep to voice, beyond the power of words for expression.

Madame St. Die had leaned back on her pillows. Her eyes came to rest on the face of the girl in something like an anxious speculation.

Yet neither woman spoke. The rumble and growl from below the horizon seemed to set a faint quiver to throbbing through the air of the room. Down there where their metallic throats bellowed, men were fighting. Below this room where they two waited, the foot of the foeman was treading the floors of their home. To the one braced by the philosophy of age, and the other burning with the hot, unvoiced protests of youth, the moment was bitter—as bitter as women have suffered through thousands of years, while the men-children of their loins made war.

A tap, faint, halting, came upon the door. It swung inward gently to show old Marthe, white-faced, hesitating on the threshold. Her eyes were full of an awed, mute horror. Her mouth opened and emitted no sound. She swallowed as by an effort and closed it dumbly, still holding the knob of the door in one gnarled hand and trembling slightly as she stood. Yet her terrified eyes turned not to the face of Madame St. Die, but to the figure of Jacqueline, very much as a dog might bid silent farewell to a beloved mistress who was going forever away.

"Speak," said the woman against the pillows in sharp command.

Marthe swallowed again. She opened her mouth for the second time.

"Mlle. Chinault," she faltered. "They wish her below. They forced me to come and say it. I could do nothing less. They compelled me to obey."

Abruptly she released the knob and turned away as if to conceal her face. They heard her shuffle off along the hall.

The eyes of the two women met. And again neither spoke. But in that long glance, age spoke to youth, and the soul of woman to woman in silent encouragement and counsel. What of sickening fear, what of dread menace to youth might lurk in that call for the younger, each read in the eyes of the other, the widened pupils, the firmer lips, the fading of color. And with it each read the conscious knowledge of the futility of any refusal or resistance.

Jacqueline rose. She was pale but seemingly calm.

"You heard. I must go. In all I must obey them, as Marthe obeyed. Pierre and little Jean are hostage for my submission in all things. *Mon Dieu*, were I but a man——"

"As it happens, you are a woman, beautiful, young," said her aunt. "Come here. Down by the bed. Down on your knees." She forced herself up again and took the face of the kneeling girl between her two thin, hot hands. "The good God go with you, my child. Be discreet as well as submissive. They are rough men, their passions inflamed by the blood lust and the weeks of killing—and you are but a flower in the field of an alien nation, to be crushed for a whim if desired. Would that I, the old woman, the withered weed, could go down to meet them in your place, but—it seems I can not."

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She bent over to press her lips to the other's forehead. One might have noticed that they quivered as they met the white flesh.

"God guard you, Jacqueline Chinault."

III

JACQUELINE rose from her knees. Her heart beating a trifle more quickly, she opened the door and passed into the upper hall. At the head of the stairs she paused a moment looking down.

The sentry still stood by the courtyard door, silent, motionless as a piece of old armor, his carbine slanted across his breast as she had left him. She went down slowly and found his eyes upon her, marking her progress step by step. As she reached the foot of the flight, he removed a hand from the barrel of his weapon and waved it toward the dining-room where Steinwald had had his wine, and from whence the sound of voices now reached her.

"You are wanted in there," he said in German.

She made her way to the door and paused before its closed panels to steady her control. Some of the color had drained even from her lips, and her eyes were unnaturally bright by contrast. What fate lay on the other side of that barrier of wood, she had no way of knowing, and as she had said of Pierre to Steinwald, she too had heard tales —dread things of horror to a woman.

The hand she laid on the knob was cold to her own perception. Very slowly she turned the latch, opened the door, passed in and closed it, to lean against it, before raising her eyes to face what might come.

The familiar room was now occupied by several men in the full uniform of the German service. They had formed a little group, standing by the side of the table. At the sound of her entrance they wheeled about. She found herself, on the instant, confronting the man she had seen descend from the motor some time before.

Seen thus closely, his features were not unpleasant. He had removed his helmet and placed it on the table. She saw that his hair was a light brown, brushed thickly back from a broad brow, that his chin held a little cleft, that his upper lip was covered by a soft, almost silken mustache, below which his mouth, somewhat petulant in repose and thin-lipped, was tentatively smiling now. The hand from which he had drawn a gantlet, was slender but sinewy, strong, a capable hand.

Even in that first moment, her intuition told her that here was a man, not of the common order—one to be reckoned with always, when met; who in peace or war would be heard from and make his presence felt; as unlike the gruff Steinwald, in his finished poise, as she herself was unlike the common woman of her people. She opened her lips.

"I understood that my presence was desired here," she began as coldly as her hands, which now seemed turning to ice.

The man she addressed thus indirectly, clicked his heels together in the subsequent pause, and bowed.

"It was I, Mademoiselle Chinault," he announced in faultless French. "I directed your old serving woman to request the presence of whoever might represent this household. I am Colonel Fredreich of his Imperial Majesty's forces, and I find it necessary for military reasons to occupy your château. You are in charge here—really?"

He had straightened and was eying her in a manner which, while not offensive, still gave evidence of a full appreciation of her charm.

"During the illness of my aunt who is confined to her room above-stairs, yes," Jacqueline responded with relief.

Despite his continued staring she found her courage rising somewhat. The man appeared a gentleman in every sense. His pose was that of one to the manner born. His instant reply carried out the impression completely. His eyes narrowed slightly.

"You have sickness?" he asked in surprised interest.

"Yes. My father's sister."

"Not serious, I trust?" It was the remark of an acquaintance, rather than that of a foeman.

"Until the last day or two, yes. She is convalescent we hope now, Colonel." Jacqueline was conscious of a feeling of surprise at the freedom with which she found herself replying to his questions.

Fredreich swung to those about him.

"Gentlemen, you hear? There is sickness in this house—Mademoiselle's aunt—a soldier's sister. Conduct yourselves in accord with the condition."

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Their hands rose quickly in salute. The Colonel once more directed his remarks to Mlle. Chinault.

"We shall make our occupation as little troublesome as need be, I assure you. I do not wish in any way to curtail your freedom beyond the exigencies of the case. You will be at perfect liberty to come and go about the house as you wish, remaining in charge of your dependents as heretofore."

A sudden revulsion of feeling shook the girl. Regardless of the relation in which they stood to one another, she could do no less than appreciate the ready courtesy of the soldier. She smiled slightly.

"If you will go a step further with your kindness and say as much to the sentry in the hall. I was ordered to remain above-stairs at my peril by Captain Steinwald."

Fredreich shrugged.

"There are times when Steinwald is a trifle overly zealous. My apologies for him. Better too much than too little zeal you must appreciate, Mademoiselle. But—the sentry will not interfere with your goings and comings from now on, I promise."

Jacqueline bowed.

"Thank you. Your consideration is so much greater than I feared, that it makes me bold to speak of another matter."

"Yes?" prompted the Colonel, as she paused, a bit uncertain now she had gone so far.

"Captain Steinwald also arrested two of my house servants to be held hostage for the good behavior of my people and myself."

"So he said," Fredreich nodded. "You see, my dear young lady, you and the man and the boy were guilty of an offense against the rules governing the conduct of our forces in an enemy's country, when you furnished petrol to that scout—an offense indeed, which had your army been closer might even have interfered with some of our plans. Whoever helps an enemy of ours, performs an act against us, and while I may appreciate your personal feelings in the matter fully, yet Captain Steinwald was perfectly within his rights, believe me."

"But—" Jacqueline found now that she faltered. Notwithstanding the absolute suavity of the German's tones, she sensed a surprising element of finality in his words, against which she made none the less her little effort. "Must they still be held?"

"I regret of course, but I fear they must," said the Colonel as easily as ever. "However, you need have not the slightest worry on their account. So long as the acts for which their welfare is guarantee are not committed, as I feel sure they will not be, they are in not the least possible danger. On the other hand, to release them would not be expedient just at this time, I think. The chief value of a hostage lies in the certain knowledge of his friends that any act inimical to us will at once be visited upon him. Any indication of leniency toward the hostage on our part destroys his value. That, it seems to me, is a logical conclusion."

Jacqueline flushed. It had seemed to her that a veiled amusement had run through his tone at the last.

"Logical perhaps, but cruel, Colonel—without any pity or compassion," she rejoined.

Fredreich shrugged the least bit.

"Indeed yes. What place has pity in war? If you will read the works of my countryman, Von Glotz, you will see that he says no pity should ever be shown a conquered people. The more harsh the treatment accorded, the sooner will the spirit of the vanquished be broken and an ultimate peace attained."

Like an echo to his words, the men about him nodded their agreement.

"And you are the disciple of a creed such as that?" cried the girl, forgetting all caution in the horrified shock his words afforded. "You want me to believe you uphold such a doctrine—you, a man of education, whose bearing alone shows the quality of his birth?"

"I am a soldier at present, mademoiselle," he smiled. "Not a gentleman or a philosopher. In the *Kriegsspiel*, he wins who has the least compassion—preferably none. But enough. It becomes, as I said, necessary to occupy the château. I am showing you what consideration I can. As for the man and the boy, they will be held as a surety against any annoyance. If your people obey our orders, there will be no trouble. If now I could have a table placed in the courtyard to use for some necessary work, I shall leave you the house. We shall obtain luncheon from our kitchens, but dinner for myself and staff would be an agreeable change for men who have campaigned for weeks. And in addition we might have some bottles of wine at once——"

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"You have but to command." Jacqueline waved her hand to the table where the tray and bottle still reposed. "Your Captain appreciated that equally with yourself. While less mild in manner, he was more direct."

The Colonel shot her a glance of understanding and chuckled.

"Steinwald is a bit of a bear and a bit of a boar with a dash of plain pig," he remarked.

"He exhibited all three characteristics, this morning," she retorted, still further nettled by his quiet air of amusement.

The eyes of the Colonel danced. His air of enjoying things increased.

"There is one thing more. I should be greatly honored if you will grace our dinner with your presence." There was a challenge in both his words and glance.

"Very well," Jacqueline accepted the gage. Of a sudden she found her cheeks burning. "I shall arrange for your table and the wine, at once," she hurried on, furious at herself for the sign of confused annoyance.

"My thanks in advance." Once more the Colonel's heels clicked as he bowed. "We shall adjourn to the courtyard at once then, Mademoiselle, until dinner. Munster—the door for Mademoiselle."

One of the men of his escort sprang forward, set the door wide and bowed with stiff precision as she left the room.

IT WAS past noon. Jacqueline found Marthe below in the kitchen, which was located in the very foundations of the château, and sent her flying to get the table and the wine, with the assistance of some of the old men and boys who had drifted curiously and yet timidly up from the cottages below, and now stood outside in a chattering group, discussing the situation with violently speculative predictions as to the probable fates of themselves and Jean and Pierre. With her own hands, she prepared herself some luncheon and arranged a tray for her aunt.

In a way she felt somewhat relieved. Fredreich had been courteous beyond anything for which she had hoped. She could not doubt that he was at least a man of culture and polish. His diction, his intonation, his perfect command of her own tongue, all spoke of one who had enjoyed the highest advantages of education.

And yet as she spread a serviette over the tray and placed the food upon it, her hands were still cold. There had been a hardness under all his surface softness. When he replied to her about Pierre and little Jean Giroux, it had even crept briefly into his tones, giving them a finality of decision one could not possibly ignore.

It came to her that she and hers were no whit less in durance, despite the slight extension of her personal freedom, than when the gruffer, more brutally direct Captain of hussars, had ordered her into the upper regions of the house. The sole difference lay in the manner of gaining the end desired, as she herself had intimated in her retort concerning the wine. In the final issue, she felt, the man who bowed and clicked his heels and spoke in polished phrases, would doubtless prove as implacable as the swashbuckler Captain who said without any consideration of conventions exactly what he meant.

She lifted the tray and climbed up to the lower hall. The sentry had been removed from beside the door. At the head of the stairs, on the floor above, she paused by a window giving on the court.

Already Fredreich and his men were gathering about a table on which were bottles of wine, spread-out maps, pens and paper, a typewriter of a portable sort on which a spectacled aide was writing. A man, putteed and goggled, was just mounting a sputtering motorcycle to ride off, as she looked out. An officer stood at attention beside a light auto. To him Col. Fredreich appeared to be speaking directly. He paused. The officer saluted and sprang aboard the motor to vanish with roaring engine out of the courtyard gate.

Some soldiers came in with a steaming kettle and a pile of thick plates. Papers and maps were pushed aside and the food set out on the table. Fredreich tasted it with a spoon, evidently found it hot, grimaced and made some remark at which the others laughed. From below the horizon again came the grumble of guns.

She had heard them for days, dull, muffled, pound, pound, until at times it seemed to her that they hummed and buzzed continually in her ears. But always, before, they had been from the north and east instead of the south and west. Then their menace had been of the future—always postponed—perhaps never to be realized. Now—she lifted the tray again and sighed.

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While her aunt ate, she told her all her experience with Fredreich.

"The man is a gentleman by birth and training," she made a finish. "If I had met him anywhere else, under any other conditions, I should have considered him unusually attractive — uncommon indeed. Save in the matter of Pierre and Jean, he was consideration itself."

Her aunt nodded.

"There are no more finished gentlemen in the world than the Germans. They are an apprehensive race—that is they adopt the best of what they find in all races, to themselves. And they are adaptive. They can go into a country and adopt its manners, its customs, even its speech after a time. Their spy system proves that. Men's own neighbors, living beside them for years, did not know them for German spies until the war was a fact, and they were detected in the performance of the mission for which they had been ready for years. They take a brilliant polish.

"But—under it all my child is the basal stolidity of their race. Their polish becomes the sheen of the sword blade, under which the steel is none the less hard and cold. Of a logical turn of mind, they have reduced logic to the abstruse, robbed it of all human elements and emotions, until such logic, plus the national stolidity of opinion, has produced the logical result of hardness—polished hardness perhaps and more polished for that, but hardness none the less.

"I am speaking of the educated, the official class now of course. The masses, barring the primal stolidity, are very much the same as any other modern race of men, with their little lives and their little loves and hopes and desires. They are after all the material with which and upon which the logicians work."

Jacqueline made no reply as she sponged her aunt's hands and dried them. But she pressed her lips a trifle more firmly together. The words had been in a way, but a reiteration of her own subconscious appraisement of the Colonel. She put aside the bowl and towel she had used and gave the invalid a toothpick, which being somewhat proud of her still sound teeth, she insisted on using after every meal. Crossing to a window she looked out.

Save for the muttering thunder, which had rolled sullenly all day, the scene was quiet. A half-misted sunshine lay over the hills. A motor was fleeing swiftly along a road.

Nearer, a motorcycle darted into sight in a smother of haste and dust. She could see the cavalry horses ranged in long rows, munching fodder, their riders walking about or lounging in groups on the ground, chatting, smoking, playing cards, one or two plying needle and thread in thrifty repairs. At another time she would have called them a splendid body of men—quiet, orderly, impressive in their dark uniforms and white-trimmed busbys.

"What are they doing?" queried Madame St. Die, behind her.

"Feeding their horses and resting," Jacqueline told her. "I suppose I had best go down and help Marthe out with the dinner, at which I am to be guest." With one of the quick mood changes of youth she paused to laugh. "If it didn't hurt so, it would be amusing, that—being a guest under my own roof, at a dinner provided by myself. I shall go now and see to preparing my own refreshment. Adieu, auntie mine."

She went out feeling somewhat lightened by her own facetious remarks and paused once more by the window and inspected the court. The group by the table had drawn together. The typewriter was going. One or two other aides were writing. Now and then as one finished some bit of work, he passed it to Fredreich, who signed it. Ever and again those papers were shoved into the hands of putteed and goggled men who mounted chattering motorcycles or autos and dashed off.

The whole enclosure seemed a jumble of autos and cycles, with here and there a horse, standing quietly among all the cracking of engines and switching its tail at flies. At intervals, as she watched, an auto or a dust-covered cycle and rider arrived. Men descended from them, approached the group at the table, saluted and delivered written or verbal messages to the Colonel or one of his men. To the morning's quiet of the courtyard, had succeeded an orderly haste of action.

She lifted her eyes. Beyond the court were two great towers of time-grayed stone, round, crowned by conical wooden covers. There were joined by a buttress of stone, containing rooms, now used merely for storage, but once the dungeons and keep of the old château. Pigeons strutted about

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the sloping roofs or fluttered up in idle flight to alight again undisturbed by the turmoil below. If one did not drop their eyes it was all very peaceful, with just the tops of the towers and the sunshine and the pigeons, unless one gave heed to that pound, pound of guns, as persistently steady as the pulse of a clock beating out the hour of doom.

Unmindful that she had watched the active center of any army division headquarters' staff, she went on to the far end of the corridor, where her own room was placed, and approached a window facing the west. As she had seen the cavalry from her aunt's room, so now the infantry appeared.

And the infantry were busy. Its men had thrown off haversacks and equipment and were hurriedly digging little slots in the soil, such as one sees dug for water-pipes or gas-mains in every-day life. They used little short-handled shovels and labored like navvies at their ditching. To a military mind they were intrenching, digging themselves in breast high. In those ditches they would stand up and shoot at a foe which attacked.

For some time she watched them, and others who were carrying great loads of bushes and placing them somewhat in front of the trenches at spots designated by an officer stalking in trim, tailored stiffness along the line. Her lips drooped and her hands clenched as she watched. Those lines torn out of the turf of her fields spoke so baldly of occupation, of her own helpless condition, of the defeat of her country's army, the giving up of her country's soil.

Driven more by the need of something to divert her thoughts from their morbid course than for any other reason, she descended to the kitchen and old Marthe, to lend a hand in the preparations for the dinner.

THE afternoon dragged along. About three the pound of the guns died down, almost ceased, save for an occasional distant concussion. At four came a soldier from the artillery to the kitchen door with a demand for more wine for the staff.

Jacqueline sent Marthe to get it from the cellar and invited the man inside. A sudden desire to inspect this foeman at close range, inspired her action. She wanted to study the man, find out what sort of being he was, gain a personal opinion of the individual private of this army which had come so suddenly upon her. She spoke to him in German, with which she was conversant, offering him a chair.

He was a heavy, blond giant with flaxen beard and small blue eyes which twinkled in friendly fashion. He smiled slowly on hearing his tongue from her lips, took the seat and after asking permission, produced and lighted a huge porcelain pipe.

"A cup of coffee, Herr soldier?" the girl suggested.

He nodded.

"*Danke schön, gnädiges Fräulein, ja,*" he accepted, puffing away.

She filled a cup and drew him into conversation. He was from Nuremberg and had worked in a factory for toys. He had a wife and three children, of whom he spoke, while he sipped at his coffee.

"This war is a calamity," he declared deeply. "War I like not. Now that the factory closed is, and the shipments go not out, there will be not toys enough for the little ones all over the world at Christmas. The pack of Kris Kringle will be very light. That is too bad, is it not?"

Jacqueline nodded. A funny little lump crept up into her throat.

"It is all so sad," she agreed, meaning that of which he spoke, and the war, and all it entailed, "such a shame!"

"*Ja*, so is it." He cast his eyes about the kitchen. "You have a very nice kitchen, *Fräulein*. At home, my wife, a fine kitchen has too, though not so large."

He knocked the ashes from his pipe into his palm, rose and carried them to the stove to empty them in. He smiled.

"Always at home my wife says, 'smoke father if you want, but drop not the ashes on the floor.' "

Marthe came back with the wine. The man took it and departed, thanking them for their trouble. Jacqueline watched him. As her aunt had said, it came to her now also, that this man who spoke of wife and home and little children and toys was a bit of that common clay with which the over classes worked. Vaguely she found herself wondering if perhaps before long his great body in its gray with the scarlet facings might not become in very truth a bit of common clay and nothing more.

At five the gun-fire broke out with redoubled vigor and, as it seemed to Jacqueline, decidedly greater nearness, and at six

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came one of the larger boys from the cottages, his face distorted with both fear and anger, saying that the soldiers were compelling the sons of Martin Poulet and Marie Senlis to drive up all the cattle they had hidden in the timber at the hussar's approach. They were to be killed and boiled in the wheeled kitchens. There would not be one left to give milk for the children. These Germans were worse than a plague of locusts, eating up the country as they passed.

Jacqueline's lips came together. These were her people whose possessions were assailed. Not all the old feudal attitude passed from France with the passing of the king, or from the hearts of those families still holding their ancestral estates.

She dried her hands quickly and walked out of the kitchen. Without pause she went directly to the courtyard, where the odor of burned petrol was a stench in the air, and on across it toward the group about the the table, with its litter of papers and maps, pens and ink, bottles of wine and half-filled glasses.

An officer, noting her coming, spoke to the Colonel, as she saw. Fredreich rose and awaited her approach, with his helmet tucked under an arm.

She spoke from the need of her people, unmindful of the apron knotted about her slender waist, or the sleeves rolled back above her elbows.

"Colonel, is it quite necessary to slaughter all our cattle? There are children among my people who need milk as badly, surely, as your men need fresh meat."

The Colonel smiled slightly. His glance swept her from bared head to foot.

"To an advocate so charming, one finds it easy to listen," he said lightly. "How many of these sucklings have we, Mademoiselle?"

Jacqueline considered.

"Six young enough to depend upon it, and—" she paused a moment before going on—"Marie Senlis expects another."

Fredreich nodded.

"Being a peasant she should be able to feed that herself." He swung back to the table. "Munster, go thou and see to it. Direct that two cows in prime milk be spared. Is that all, Mademoiselle?"

"All, I thank you, Colonel," she bowed.

"Good."

He turned to an aide, who began a rapid writing from his dictation.

Jacqueline retraced her steps, threading among autos and motorcycles to which it seemed fresh arrivals were being added every moment, roaring dust whitened in through the gate. Yet as she turned on the steps for a final inspection, she saw the man called Munster stride out on the errand connected with her appeal. In all that atmosphere of suppressed excitement, of roaring engines, and nearer, heavier, harsher pound of cannon, it seemed almost an incongruous service for one in his brilliant attire. Her lips twitched in a little smile.

She went back to the kitchen for a final inspection of the dinner arrangements, then, leaving Marthe to finish, ascended to her own room to prepare herself for the meal. After some deliberation, she selected a gown of sheer black tissue, made in long flowing lines, threw off the dress she had worn since morning and slipped on the other. From its low yoke and straps her arms and shoulders rose in a warm, virginal softness, made doubly fair by the somber color of the fabric.

Taking a small lavallière containing a diamond and several pearls, she snapped it about her throat, hesitated, then selected a single flaming rose, made of the softest silken substance, and fastened it in her corsage, where it lay in vivid contrast below her heart, the only spot of color in her otherwise funereal attire.

Closing the door of her room, she made her way back to her aunt, coming into a room of shadows, where the twilight gathered and the lamps were yet unlighted.

The little lady eyed her closely.

"*Tres joli,*" she said brightly. "You should make an impression, *ma chèrie.*"

Jacqueline flushed in the dusk.

"Impression!" she gave back with a flash of fire. "Do you imagine I am thinking of that? This is the hardest thing I have ever done in my life—to go down there and sit in the presence of those men—the invaders—the violators of France. This costume is not to make an impression, unless it be one of mourning. The diamond and pearls are tears, the red of the rose is a wound and its blood." Her voice quavered, threatened to break.

"Come here, Jacqueline," said Madame St. Die quickly. "Sit down beside me in the twilight, as you have done so many times in the many past years. It is a time for confidences, the twilight, is it not? Then listen.

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You say this is hard, and I doubt not that it is. But why wonder? You are a woman, and war is always hard for women. They play the waiting part, and nothing is harder than waiting.

"Do you think the men out there bear the brunt of the hardship? Oh no—not even though they die. They die in the heat of action. It is women, those who bear those men and send them away to die or return, and remain behind to wait, not knowing, who feel the full horror of war. And what is this thing you are doing, compared to that? Yet the daughter of a nation may sometimes serve it—even by waiting. And to help you to wait, I shall tell you something I withheld from you this morning.

"I spoke then to you of a plan, of a time when the armies of France should fall back no longer, but turn and rend the invader. And my child, there were really a number of plans, each depending on the success or failure of the other. Should any fail, there was always another to be tried, even up to the guns of Paris; and if that failed and Paris fell, still there was a plan after that. But one of those plans had to do with a river, across which France should contest the advance."

In the fading light, while her elder spoke, the white breast of the younger woman took on a faster rhythm of breathing. Her eyes, brooding dully at first, began to shine. As the voice of the speaker ceased, she spoke in turn:

"And that river? *Mon Dieu!* Can you mean——"

"That the best service you can do France is to be submissive and wait," said Madame St. Die; "so that the German thinks us already beaten. He has advanced far and quickly. Of late he has rushed forward in even greater haste. He considers that he drives a disordered army before him, and—he has reached the Marne."

Jacqueline's breath caught in a gasp.

"You have helped me as always," she whispered. "My father told you this—in the past?"

"We are brother and sister and love our country," said her aunt.

"And you tell me now—why?"

"To help you as you just said—to give you courage, my child, to wait."

"But if they should suspect? Can they be so blind as not to have any suspicions? If they should learn of this plan?" Jacqueline spoke softly, swiftly, leaning close.

"Learn?" For a moment the hand of the speaker, hot with the fervor of her emotion, fell over the hand of the girl and held it. "None here know it save you and me, at least. And—*la* child! What chance have they to learn—from two women of France?"

IV

THE courtyard was full of the glow from auto headlights, the chatter of motors, as Jacqueline went down. Through the open door of the hall, she saw that the men about the table worked by the light from one of these so placed as to shine upon them.

She quickened her steps to see that all was ready, found the table spread and returned to the front, where she hailed a passing courier and requested him to take word to the Colonel.

Returning, she awaited her self-invited guests in the dining-room itself, as they came in heavy-footed, leaving a sentry posted at the door, the Colonel at their head.

As before, he clicked his heels and bowed. She felt his eyes once more sweep her in a bold appraisement as he straightened.

"Charming," he said softly, coming to her side. "To your graciousness of personal presence I perceive that you have added the final honor of wearing our colors for the occasion. That is hospitality indeed."

Involuntarily she stiffened.

"I fear, Colonel that I do not comprehend," she found herself saying.

He answered her, smiling:

"Your hair and your gown are so black, and your flesh is so white, and your lips and the rose are so red. And the red and the black and the white, are surely my country's colors, and never more charmingly shown."

She met the sally with heightened color and snapping eyes. This adroit perversion of what she had intended more as a costume filling in its somber details to her position, than anything even approaching his jesting suggestion of a personal compliment, aroused all the instinctive antagonism of her nature. And it seemed to her in that moment that, rather than being confused, harassed by this meeting and what she knew was to follow, her spirit gathered itself

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together, inspiring a cold clearness of thought and words. Her return of her enemy's smile was hard, brilliant.

"Now I comprehend. One does not choose the colors nature gives to one, my Colonel. One selects only the colors of the heart,—the soul. Perhaps without really intending, you have given me the reason for a lifelong dissatisfaction with myself."

"*Himmel!*" Fredreich exclaimed, and included his staff in the byplay of wits. "Gentlemen, did you hear? We must have this young woman to Paris when once we have its government established. Both her tongue and her beauty would without doubt find appreciation, and the last excuse the former, I am sure."

"When your government is established, I will come," she flared in retort, her color rising.

"Enough," said Fredreich laughing. "Come. Will you sit beside me where we can talk? You see I am selfish, but why else is one a commander?"

He advanced to the head of the table and laid a hand on the back of a chair. Jacqueline bowed and moved to the place assigned. The others of Fredreich's staff selected places for themselves. She found herself looking down twin rows of alien faces, standing about the table, awaiting the lead of their commander.

He bent over and lifted a bottle of wine, filling Jacqueline's glass and his own, and motioning to his men to do the same. He lifted his glass and held it before him.

"A little toast, anent our recent verbal fencing," he remarked. "Gentlemen, I give you '*Nach Paris.*' "

For one whirling moment, she felt herself trapped, forced into an unescapable *impasse* at the very start. Then while she strove desperately for some solution other than the obvious one the man expected. For some reason unknown to herself, there swam before her mental vision the face of a man in heavy costume, long, square-jawed, high in the cheekbones, wrinkled slightly at the corners of the eyes—the face of the man in the monoplane that morning. And by association of ideas as it seemed, was suggested a way out of the position into which the Colonel's deliberate words had forced her. As the staff lifted their glasses and turned eyes toward the head of the table, as if awaiting her action, she caught up her wine and raised it, extended toward them.

"To Paris!" she cried in English, and set the glass to her lips.

Fredreich drank, set down his glass and drew out her chair.

"Clever," he whispered into her ear, as he saw her seated. "And apropos of your evasion of my little trap, suppose we converse in the tongue of that declining nation."

"Declining?" she questioned as Marthe began to serve.

"But yes," Fredreich nodded. "She is no longer virile. She has been too long engaged in the arts of peace. When a nation forsakes the sword for the artisan's tool, the national fiber of that nation weakens. It is the history of nations, which he who runs may read. Yet there is but one nation which has read the philosophy of history in its true meaning and kept her virility strong, even in times of peace. And because of that, it is the nation which will triumph over the degenerate and the decadent."

"Degenerate? Decadent?" said Jacqueline, and knew with swift displeasure that she faltered.

"Exactly. Degenerate England, and decadent France."

Somewhere within her, Jacqueline felt a little quiver wake and spread and threaten to engulf her; but she forced it back. And yet, save for that momentary tremor, evoked by the considered taunt she felt in Fredreich's words, that strange mental clarity kept up. It seemed to her that her brain ran smoothly, swiftly, giving off clear thought as a well-tuned engine might deliver power.

"Since you advocate the belief that a nation given over to peaceful pursuits grows weak in the martial arts, what about Belgium?" she said.

"Belgium?" Fredreich shrugged. "What about her? There was a Belgium once, I admit. Look at her now. The virile must and will overcome the weak. That is the law of nature—the survival of the fittest. Darwin had a glimmer of common sense even if English. As it happens today we are the virile among nations. Therefore—" He smiled.

Alternate waves of heat and numbing cold appeared to Jacqueline to pursue one another through her body and limbs. Conscious now of the fact that she was the object of a deliberate baiting by the man who

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addressed her, she was still forced to admit that so far as his personal attitude was concerned he might have been but a chance acquaintance indulging in a purely analytical discussion of a theoretical instance. His surface manner was courtesy itself. Even now he was himself filling her partly emptied glass.

Here indeed was the sheen on the sword-blade her aunt had mentioned, the polish overlying the cold hardness of race and studied training. He brought the logic of his statements to bear with the precision and impersonal demeanor of one demonstrating some formula or equation.

A sudden desire to force him to show his whole position, to antagonize and oppose him, swept her. In that moment she would have liked to strip the artificial veneer from his soul and unveil the man as he was, be the cost what it might. She waited until her glass was brimming, then folded her fingers about its stem.

"You are so sure—so sure?" she said, meeting his eyes; and even as she paused the air quivered with the grumble of far guns.

Fredreich's eyes contracted slightly. He waited until the dull rumble diminished and died, cocking his head a trifle to one side, as if he listened to them.

"Perhaps that is a better answer than words," he returned slowly, after the pause. "But to go on with words: Can you doubt it? We are here. The army of France is beyond us. We have brushed it aside at will or gone over it directly and gone on. To you that, of course, is painful, but one can not escape the logic of what has happened, be it painful or not. And unless all precedent is demolished, we must conquer. The philosophy of nations proves that. This is the beginning of the real Germanic prestige.

"Let us again look back. No nation ever rose to influence and power save by conquest. Where is there one? When they gave over conquest and the preparation for it in peace, the training of their youth to arms, they began their decline and fall. Take Rome, for example. When she relaxed, her manhood grew effeminate, her womanhood, fond of luxury, abnormally erotic rather than the mothers of the nation. And—pardon my frankness, but in France the same conditions prevail today—have done so until France has become the laughing-stock of more virile nations. England is fast reaching the same condition, save that she deludes herself with vicarious victories on the tennis and golf fields, and at polo, into thinking her manhood still capable of meeting a real test. All nations have done similar things toward the beginning of their end."

He sipped his wine for a moment. "On the other hand, as a nation we are young, growing. Our men are virile, our women are *real* women, not creatures of pleasure—toys. You pleasure-lovers, you devotees of so-called culture, call us brutal because we encourage such things as the college duel and those between our officers in the army. To you perhaps they are brutal. Admit the charge in the concrete. But they keep alive the martial spirit, the contempt for wounds, the familiarity with bloodshed. You call us brutal because of the severity of our officers to our recruits. Admit it again, but admit also that it maintains a discipline which makes our soldiers go where sent and do what is ordered without question; and further, that it robs the officer of any compunctions in sending them to certain destruction, if needs be, to gain an end. It serves a purpose. To that end and that purpose we have consciously labored for years."

Once more he lifted his glass and drank.

"And it is rather odd in your case that your own great man, the Emperor Napoleon, planted the germ which brought it all about. In the case of France, it is the story of Frankenstein all over."

"Frankenstein?" Jacqueline repeated. "The man who constructed a thing he could not control and was destroyed by it. Is that what you mean?"

"Precisely. When Napoleon conquered Prussia, one of his requirements was the abolition of our army. It was a Prussian Princess gave birth to our present greatness. For her favor, Napoleon rescinded his demand and granted us the right to maintain an army of twelve thousand men. That was the beginning. We kept the strict letter of the agreement, but not its spirit. So fast as the twelve thousand were trained, finished, we dismissed a few here and there and filled the ranks with fresh levies. At no time had we more than twelve thousand, but—in the end every man able to bear a weapon was a trained soldier. Your Emperor Napoleon III. finished the Frankenstein by welding a series of racially allied states into a firm national unit. Since

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then there has been but one inevitable result, for which we have prepared."

Jacqueline toyed with the food on her plate. To swallow it, she felt would choke her. Her throat ached with suppressed emotions, her mouth even felt dry so that she continually wet it with little sips at her glass.

"You admit then that the salvation of your nation and the beginning of her greatness was in and by the sacrifice of a woman. Some might question the justification of her course."

Again Fredreich shrugged.

"From a purely individual standpoint, perhaps. From a national standpoint the means must always be justified by the end. The individual welfare must always be subordinated to the good of the state. The state is the principal consideration. Against that the individual is nothing."

"You consider, then, that a woman would be justified in sacrificing anything whatsoever to win a point for her country?"

Mlle. Chinault's lips curled slightly about the question. The Colonel gave small attention to her facial expression, however.

"Anything whatsoever," he returned without hesitation, quoting her own words.

"You hold nothing sacred?"

The hot blood of the virgin woman dyed her neck and face to the roots of her hair, flaunting the colors of indignation and womanly anger.

"The state—the nation, yes," he replied.

"And you recognize nothing higher?"

"There is nothing higher, Mademoiselle."

Her color faded as quickly as it had flamed. Once more she felt strangely cold. She let her eyes wander down the table where the foemen of her country were filling themselves with food. For any attention they gave her, she and the man at her side might have been alone. They ate and they drank with a clatter of knife and fork and china, the gurgle of liquid in a gullet, the smack of heavy lips. And they were all actuated by the same spirit voiced by her companion, who delivered his thrusts at her helpless impotence in the finished phrases of one trained in the school of worldly contact —thrust and thrust, not through ignorance and its blundering expression, but by intent.

In a resurgence of loathing, it came to her that she preferred the brutal directness of the man who had made her body the test of his own safety that morning, to this other. Steinwald would have harmed only her physical state at worst. This man stabbed into her spirit and brain with the skill of a fencer, and left them bleeding but still alive to suffer and writhe before his observing eyes.

She turned to find the tentative smile back on his lips. It was like the flick of a whip across raw shoulders.

"You are forgetting one thing in all this," she cried; "the one thing higher than the state. You are even forgetting two things, Colonel. In your logic and its conclusions, you are forgetting Almighty God and His Son. You preach the doctrine of Antichrist. Your philosophy is as material as your swords or your guns. Do you fancy that you can conquer completely, or long hold those people who forget neither, who hold something sacred outside material gain and worldly conquest?

"The people of England love their nation, and the people of France—ah, they love their nation too. And Belgium! The Belgians have fought, and died, and starved, and been tortured, and still fight, just because they love their nation, and want to go on living as Belgians. Even little Luxembourg whose national song says, 'We want to stay just as we are,' would have fought you, too, if you had not seized them before they knew they were in danger. You say we have offered you no resistance, but thousands of our people have offered you the supreme measures of any patriots' resistance and devotion —their lives—are offering it now down there where your guns roll and grumble—and will in the days to come.

"And in your wonderful philosophy, your splendid logic, there is one flaw. You say the individual is nothing, and I grant you have proved your words in deeds. Because of that attitude you have thrown your men—your individuals, away with a lavish hand. You are here today because you have done it, and because France and England are not yet willing to spend their manhood so freely, even when fighting for their national existence and their right to live. But before they give up this fight—that right, they *will* spend their manhood to the last unit, and each unit will be spent with its own consent—as a patriot and soldier, not because of a discipline so cruel that it

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inspires fear, but because he loves his country and is willing to give his life to prove it and give to unborn generations the right to live English and French. And the God who made races and raised up nations, will give to them the final triumph, when your driven individuals are spent."

She paused, her breast rising and falling over a hurried breathing, her lips parted, the pupils of her eyes expanded to the very rim of the iris, like the eyes of one who sees dim pictures of the future, still veiled to material sight.

A slow fire answered her defiance in the eyes of the man, but a fire born of material reason, material attraction. He flushed darkly.

"Superb!" he exclaimed softly. "What a pity to quench such a spirit in defeat! And yet, Mademoiselle, granting all due weight to your rhetoric and the patriotism behind it, I am of the unswayed opinion that the God you mention is now as ever on the side of the heaviest guns."

She made no answer and he went on after a momentary pause:

"What happened at Liége? Our shells tore their forts to atoms, buried their garrisons by hundreds in the ruins, left the place a thing of smoking wreckage, a monument to our artillery's might. At Namur, vaunted as a place of invincible defense, it was the same. The same at Maubeuge is now going on. In fact, it is always the same as we advance. You have nothing which can withstand our forty-two centimeter guns. They have proven the futility of all permanent fortification. Does that predicate any such result as you allow your very natural fervor to foretell?"

Still she sat silent, with something of the momentary fire dying out of face and posture. This passing of the verbal ball was all coming to her to resemble some ordeal in a nightmare of horror, through which she sat with throbbing pulses and eyes which at times blurred so that the line of faces beyond her became misted and distorted into the shapes of a dream. Her throat throbbed and ached with the stress of her emotion, and while she waited, like an epitome of it all, again came the rumble, deep, dull, like the roll of a ground-shaking thunder.

And in its midst, while it muttered and growled, low-toned, arrestive, came the challenge of the sentry at the door and a panting voice barked back at it sharply.

THE door swung open and a young man appeared. His uniform was whitened with dust. His face was drawn, tired, smirched with the grime of his journey. To Jacqueline it seemed that his limbs trembled as he advanced into the room, glanced about for the Colonel, sighted him at the head of the table, approached, brought his hand to a flat salute and stood swaying slightly upon his feet.

"Speak," Fredreich commanded sharply. "Your message must be urgent to warrant this interruption. Be sure that it is."

"Excellency," gasped the newcomer, and broke into a very torrent of guttural speech.

Jacqueline found herself gasping also at the first word he uttered. Controlling her first involuntary start, she sat on, catching all that she could of his unbelievable report and feeding her very soul upon it, while she watched the faces of the two men closely.

The Colonel's was darkening swiftly in an anger he made small effort to repress. When the courier had finished, he sprang to his feet and brought a fist crashing down upon the table so that his wine upset and ran dripping from the soaked cloth.

"*Gott!*" he roared in the full grip of his passion. "Gentlemen, this fellow dares to come to me, saying our advance is halted. Halted, checked! *Heiliger Himmel!* what a message to give to our ears, who ordered an advance! Finish your suppers quickly. If the fool says truly, there is work to be done yet this evening." He turned scowling to the man beside him. "Well—why do you wait?"

"For your instructions, Herr." The man appeared to stagger.

Jacqueline caught up her wine-glass and held it toward him.

"You seem tired—a drink of wine?" There was pity in her eyes.

The fellow eyed it, half put out a hand, and turned his face to the Colonel.

"Drink it, *Dummkopf*," said the latter, growling.

The soldier drained it at a gulp.

"*Gnädiges Fräulein*," he stammered.

"Go now," said Fredreich. "Rest yourself enough to go back with my orders for a fresh advance."

The man stumbled from the room. Jacqueline watched his exit.

"The man is exhausted," she observed in a tone of protest.

"Exhausted?" Fredreich resumed his

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seat and glanced in her direction. "What of it? He has been over the road and knows it better than another."

He refilled his overturned glass, drained it and set it down empty, turning it round and round in his slim white fingers, his face distorted in a petulant frown of consideration. "Direct your servant to clear the table," he said after a bit, abruptly. "There is much to do and the courtyard is dark."

Jacqueline inclined her head. She signed Marthe to clear away. Deep within her a little trumpet of gladness was singing, growing louder and louder. Her eyes no longer blurred. They had begun to glow with an inward fire instead. And the room was hot to suffocation. She was no longer cold.

"And I would sleep under a roof," the Colonel continued. "Prepare a room for my use."

Again Jacqueline bowed.

"That is all."

"I have your permission to retire?"

The ordeal was apparently over. She wanted to escape from this room and be all alone for a few moments with the knowledge the courier's words had given to her heart and brain and soul.

"Yes," Fredreich nodded in almost indifferent fashion. "Munster," he directed, "send in any other couriers who are waiting."

Jacqueline rose, spoke briefly to Marthe in direction and quitted the room. The song in her soul had become a pæan. In the stumbling words of the man who had interrupted the dinner she had heard not only of a checking of the advance, but of a yielding of ground as well. There was a reason why the guns growled closer than they had at dawn.

She burst into Madame St. Die's room, a creature of flaming beauty, which ran to the bed and dropped down and hid its face on the other's breast and gasped out what she had heard, and ran on after that first outburst to an account of the dinner and the attitude of the Colonel, and so on and on for an hour.

At the end of that time she kissed her aunt and went to her room, seating herself by the window, without lighting the lamp. She was still too full of the thing which had happened to try to sleep. She wanted to merely sit and warm the little new-born hope it inspired in her heart and feel it flutter and stir like a small waking life.

Sitting there the dull thud of the guns still came to her. As all day, they kept on at their labor of death though the day was done. But they were nearer—ah, nearer.

By degrees, however, another sound, low, insistent, made itself sensed—a deep-pitched rhythm which rose and fell as she listened; a thing like a vast chorus, intoning sonorous passages from some ponderous score which rolled up and up in waves of heavy tempo to her ear.

Rising, she opened the window and looked out. The sound came louder. Down where the infantry had dug that afternoon, tiny camp-fires sparkled. Silhouetted against them, she saw the figures of men. And they were singing. It was from their throats the sound came. The blended volume of their voices rolled out and up to her in heavy, sonorous cadence, with the measures of marching feet: "*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles,*" the words came distinctly now.

Abruptly she shivered. To a daughter of her nation there was something sinister, full of dire threat in those guttural syllables rising up through the night. Some of their menace entered her soul. Some of the elation roused by the courier's words fell away before it.

What after all was a checking of the foe's advance, a little driving back? Would it continue? They had come so far, these Germans. Some of Fredreich's words came back to haunt her tired brain.

"*Deutschland, Deutschland über alles,*" they sang down there in the trenches. And this was French soil where they sat and sang it. Already they had marched and sung this far across her fields and hills. Would it go on, despite this temporary check? Was there grim prophecy in those heavy-throated words, not only for France, but for all the world in the end?

She stretched out her white arms to the night-shrouded west.

"France," she whispered as to some invisible presence. "France, oh France, don't you hear them? France, oh France, shall it really come true? Dear France, can you not turn them back?"

For a time she still stood looking out toward the grumble behind the veil of night. Then she turned back and threw off her gown of the evening, but instead of disrobing, slipped into another dress and threw herself so on her bed. For a long time she lay staring into the darkness, listening to

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the sound of the guns and the singing. She reviewed the events of the day and coming back again and again to the very first, when the young English scout had dropped at her gates, with his strong, kind words, his pleasant voice, his chivalrous consideration. As his face had flashed before her at dinner and helped her, so now recollection soothed her and led off into by-paths of romance where youth might wander alone. He had said he might return. With a quickened pulse she found herself wondering if indeed the future might hold the fulfilment of that promise.

And so after a still longer time, with the sounds from without growing fainter and the hope within once more beating stronger, she slept to rouse now and then and sleep again.

Waking thus once, she heard Marthe's voice and that of Fredreich as the woman showed him a room. Later still she roused and lay wide-eyed and tense for no reason whatever and found the guns dropped silent, and sighed and slept again.

And farther along in the gray of the morning, she roused and started up with the sound of a shot in her ears. She sprang from her bed, still dizzy with slumber. The blare of a bugle was filling the air of her chamber. A sound of feet running came up from below her window—an outburst of heavy shouting. A second bugle snarled a metallic command.

She ran to the window and thrust out her face. Realization caught in her throat and half stifled her breathing. High, very high and coming toward her from the western hills, was a thing like a bird with wide-spread, stiff pinions.

The crack of a field-gun broke from beyond the château. Something like a great ball of cotton-wool formed and grew in the air, beneath the oncoming aircraft. The sound of the shell's explosion came sharply down to her ears.

Without losing it for an instant, she watched the aeroplane advance. It came on swiftly. She found she must crane her head to one side and upward to mark its position. Abruptly it banked and began to circle. It seemed to her that it swam in spirals, directly over the château.

A low whining grew in her ears, gathered volume with marvelous swiftness and passed overhead. A deeper, more rending explosion than any voice of a field-gun set the very walls to shaking. Hard on its dying echoes, she heard the harsh, agonized scream of a horse.

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UNDER the gray light there was a scurry down by the trenches, where the gray infantry had sung their marching song the night before. They were scrambling up from sleep now and piling into those long ditches they had dug across the fields. They swarmed down, filling them with a mass of blue-gray backs, standing ready, their guns lying out across the fresh little bank of earth they had thrown up on the side toward the south and west.

Suddenly, right in their faces as it seemed to Jacqueline, a great whorl of fire-streaked smoke developed, flashed and writhed and detonated in a rending clangor and died. As she watched, here and there one of the gray-clad figures in the trench, sagged down to its bottom in limp token of the shrapnel's deadly work.

Her breast panting with the surprise, the unexpectedness, the terrible grip of it all and its meaning, she thrust her body farther through the window and looked up. The aeroplane still flew in circles, and though she did not comprehend its purpose at the time, signaled back to the distant guns on the hills to the south and west, the trajectory for their fire.

Beyond the château, off where the artillery had been parked the day before, a gun was barking at the great mechanical bird, like a dog at a hawk. She saw the little whorls of soft smoke as its shells burst high in the air.

Again a low whining came to her ear. A second shell exploded close to the wall of the courtyard. The breath of its rending fanned her cheek in a sulfurous wave. Its roar set her ear-drums to humming. With a sudden realization of danger, she drew back and stood with both hands at her throat, staring out at the world where the savage passions of man were now let loose.

But, despite the momentary dread which had assailed her, she smiled. Greater than any fear for self or horror, was the thought which flashed in her brain. What she herself had cried for from this very window was occurring. It was a French 'plane which circled high above her. These were French shells exploding. France was falling back

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no longer—she was advancing to the attack!

Drawn by that thought, she stole back to the window. Again she caught her breath. A great spot of color had grown over there on the hills. In the growing light, she caught a glimpse of red and blue and the glinting flash of metal.

A body of horsemen had topped the hills and was moving forward. She knew just how they would look if one were closer—men on great horses, red-trousered, blue-tuniced, each breast and back covered by a shining case of metal, helmets on their heads, long, floating horsetails flaunting from them—the cuirassiers of France. Again she clasped her hands at her throat. The cuirassiers of France! What her aunt had told her was true then.

Her aunt? She was alone in all this racket of rending shells and screeching bugles, this shouting of men and crashing of cannon. With eyes flashing, breasts heaving, she turned from the window and ran down the hall.

A shell burst full in the courtyard. The window which gave upon it cracked and flew inward with a tinkle of glass. Hoarse shouting came up through the empty sash as she ran. In a rush of excitement, she reached the door of Madame St. Die's room and flung it open.

"Auntie!" she panted. "They are coming—the cuirassiers—the guns—France! France!"

The little woman was sitting huddled up in bed, her eyes bright, two spots of color in her sallow cheeks. But she merely nodded to the girl's outburst. In that hour she was quite the *grande dame*, undisturbed at least on the surface.

"*Merci Dieu!*" she said quite calmly. "But then it is what I expected, and what I judged from the sounds. I heard them in '70, *ma petite*. Then for a whole day the French held the château, and the Germans shelled it. You have seen the marks on the walls. They destroyed the tile roofs of the towers, which we have replaced with wood. My mother and I and some of our people hid all day in the tunnel of which I think I have never told you, but which leads from Marthe's room back of the kitchen to the towers. Oh yes, I know the voice of the shells."

"But isn't it glorious, glorious!" cried the girl, exulting. "At last France is advancing, driving back the invader. Isn't it just splendid!"

"Glorious? Splendid?" repeated her aunt quite slowly. "It is showy. But when it's over—so many torn bodies, so many dead bodies of men—somebody's sons, no matter to which side they belong. No, my child, I do not think it splendid. But I am a woman. We women can never make war. We can only make men—the bodies which they throw away. Ah!"

Her voice was drowned by another infernal concussion.

"*Ma petite*," she went on when she could make herself again heard, "put a robe about me. I shall try to go below. I shall occupy Marthe's room back of the kitchen. If the French are determined to destroy my home, I should at least like to live to see what they accomplish."

Jacqueline sprang to obey.

"I—I'll get Marthe, and we'll help you down," she said, her words tripping upon one another in her haste. "You can't attempt the stairs on your feet. I—I'll carry you down myself."

"There is no particular hurry. Get Marthe. You two can manage," the invalid directed. "And Jacqueline—control yourself, my dear. There is a bottle of smelling-salts on my chiffonier. Procure it for me before you go. The odor of so much burned powder grows unpleasant."

Jacqueline Chinault threw up her arms and laughed, bending her lithe young body backward. Her face was flushed, her eyes sparkled.

"At least, you are splendid," she said and ran for the bottle of salts.

A bugle snarled again as she found it. Glancing from the window, she saw the hussars mounted, saw them surge forward, obedient to the voice of the trumpet. Their dark mass was getting in motion to oppose that other mass of red and blue over there on the hills to the west.

She returned to the bed and gave the salts to her aunt.

"I am quite comfortable now," said that lady with a thin nostril to the uncorked vial. "Go fetch Marthe, unless she has hidden herself away."

Jacqueline turned, making her way from the room to the head of the stairs leading down. A sentry still stood in the hall. As she started her descent, he came suddenly to attention. The door to the dining-room

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opened and Fredreich followed by a part of his staff came out. He was belted and booted and wore a long military cloak, clasped about the collar of his tunic and falling nearly to his heels.

Sweeping the hall with his glance as he advanced, his eyes lifted to encounter the figure of the girl, hesitating on the stairs. Instantly his helmet came off, he clicked his heels together in the manner she was coming to detest and bowed.

"Good morning, Mademoiselle," he accosted. "Did they wake you this early? But since you are aroused, will you not be gracious enough to descend for a moment. This infernal din your countrymen are making, renders it difficult to converse other than close to."

The flush of her earlier emotions still lingered softly in Jacqueline's face as she began once more to descend. Her eyes still snapped with excitement.

"I was about to see to removing my aunt to a place of greater safety," she remarked, as she reached the lower hall and paused in front of the Colonel.

"A prudent action," he made answer, and smiled somewhat grimly as he noted her manner and expression. "Under those conditions, I shall detain you for merely a moment. But in leaving, it is customary to make one's adieux." Again he smiled slightly. "You are apparently filled with excited elation, and small wonder. Your countrymen appear to have found reinforcements somewheres and to have momentarily stiffened their line. The rather surprising outburst of enterprise on their part, indeed is forcing us to interrupt our visit for purely strategic reasons. Later I hope to return and complete it, more at my leisure.

"This then is *auf wiedersehen* rather than good-by. But even so, I desire in leaving to commend your course of yesterday and last night. In all things you have acted sensibly and well, and your people have been orderly and well controlled. Such things merit appreciation. Therefore—" He broke off and addressed the sentry, still standing at attention. "My man, I presume you have a bit of chalk, have you not?"

Apparently undisturbed amid the din of the shell fire, the sentry put down his rifle, unbuttoned the front of his tunic, reached inside it and produced a piece of the required substance, which he handed to the Colonel.

Fredreich took it, stepped to the outer door, swung it back and upon its broad panel, proceeding to write in heavy script the words, "*Gute Leute*," signing them with a single massive initial below.

"The sign manual of our approval," he said, handing back the chalk. "Should any of our army come this way before I myself return, all you will need do is to point to those words, and you and yours will be absolutely safe, and find your rights respected. Since you understand German, you know they mean 'Good People,' the highest praise we can give in an enemy's country. And now delay no longer in your intended service to your aunt. It would be a *contre temps* indeed were she to take injury from the zeal of her own people. Mademoiselle—until I return."

"*Until* you return, Herr Colonel," she responded, putting a vastly different emphasis on the first word.

Fredreich smiled for the third time.

"Still unconvinced," he said lightly. "At all events, *auf wiedersehen*, Mademoiselle."

He replaced his helmet and signed to his men. At a word from one of the latter, the soldier shouldered his carbine and followed them out. The hussar's dolman flapped in his passage, and then he too was gone. She stood alone.

Turning she ran back along the hall and down to the kitchen in quest of Marthe. She found her huddled on a chair, her arms folded on a table, her face hidden in their circle. She ran up and touched her on the shoulder.

"Marthe!" she cried. "Marthe!"

The woman screamed aloud and lifted a terror-stricken face, recognized her young mistress and tottered to her feet in the grip of a life-long habit of service.

Talking, urging, Jacqueline half-led, half-forced her back to the hall above and up to the room of Madame St. Die. Together they managed to lift the invalid, stagger with her to the servant's room below and place her in Marthe's bed.

That done, Jacqueline told Marthe to watch beside her, and herself ran back to the kitchen.

"Where are you going?" her aunt's voice floated to her ears.

"For something up-stairs," she flung back in an evasive answer, and ran on.

Her pulses were dancing. She thrilled and tingled at each fresh concussion of

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shells. The Colonel was gone with his stolid staff—had admitted that he was forced to withdraw. The uproar without gave earnest to his words, and the hillside full of red and blue horsemen over there to the west.

The real motive of her present errand was to get back to a point of vantage from which she could command a view of what was occurring. Despite its horror, she found herself caught up in a compelling fascination which drew her back to the grim drama of conflict, a wide-eyed witness of the shock and grind of war.

She regained the front hall and fled panting up the stairs. To her ears the whole world now seemed filled with rending, crashing sound. By the shattered window in the upper hall, she paused briefly to look down.

The scene in the courtyard was utterly different now from that of the afternoon before. The busy bustle of men coming and going had vanished. She gazed on a scene of desolation. Several shells had exploded in the enclosure. It was deserted, the stones of its pavement shattered and torn and tossed hither and thither. The autos and motorcycles which had snapped and throbbed, had all departed, all save several cars and one or two cycles, rent by the shells, which lay in masses of useless wreckage. One of the former was blazing fiercely after its gasoline had ignited and fired its riven body. Even the top stones of the wall to the west were torn out at one point, leaving a ragged gap. A horse lay over by one of the towers in stiff-legged quiet. Blood had flowed from its torn body to form a dark pool on the stones.

As she stood, the chatter of a quick fire broke out, bringing a new note to her ears, causing her eyes to widen and darken. Unable to learn its full meaning from her position, she ran on to her own room with its west-fronting window.

THE engagement had developed steadily while she had been attending to her aunt. The body of cuirassiers still showed over there on the hills, and were no longer in motion. But there was a new element in the attack which caught and held her attention after her first swift glance. A long line of men on foot, kneeling or lying down were firing in her direction—or no, toward the trenches which the gray ranks still held and defended with a constant rattle of shots.

Abruptly, this line, crowned by little red *kepis*, rose up and began to run forward swiftly in attack. Again the snarl of the machine-gun rasped out from somewhere beyond her vision. Here and there, one of the running men staggered, appeared to stumble and crumple up and pitch down into the weeds and grass of the field. Before her eyes the whole line faltered and went to earth again. Their answering fire crashed out.

Jacqueline found her eyes wet, her dry lips moving and muttering broken fragments of entreaty and pleading.

"Come on—oh come on, you red *kepis*. Come on—come on! Drive them out of the trenches—drive them—drive them. Come on—on. Oh, God!" as they threw themselves down, "don't stop!"

But they had stopped as it seemed to her overwrought fancy. Yet at least they had gained some ground. Her eyes drifted nearer to the trenches. Whorl after whorl of flame and smoke flashed above the gray backs and died as the shrapnel again sprayed their line at a perfect range. Over at the extreme end of the line, a house which she marked as that of Marie Senlis was in flames and burning fiercely, its thatched roof sending up great quantities of flame and smoke.

Shrill cheering broke on her ringing ears. Once more the red *kepis* were up and running forward. Once more some of them fell. They sank down and lay where they had fallen, the red of their little caps hard at that distance to tell from the crimson wild poppies which dotted the field they crossed.

As the line dropped down again, she saw an officer, brave in tight red breeches and blue-and-gold tunic, run along back of the rank with a naked sword glinting in his hand, until, without apparent reason, he threw up his arms and spun around in a circle and fell down, too, in the grass.

A little sick feeling awoke somewhere deep within her being—where maternity has its shrine, perhaps. She turned her eyes and let them stray from the nearer struggle to the cuirassiers. They still sat their horses inactive, save that now and then their ranks jostled somewhat as a shell burst here and their horses plunged.

From the opposite side of the château

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once more a bugle sounded. There burst on her senses the thunderous pound of many hoofs. Into view flashed a mass of horses and men, the mounts leaping forward, the riders bent over a little in the saddle, their weapons at the first position of the charge, the black dolmans of their uniform flapping out behind each figure. The "Black Hussars of Death" were flinging the weight of their mass on the squadron of cuirassiers!

In its pure action, it was a sight to thrill and enthrall, by its perfection of execution. In its foreshadowing meaning, it was a thing to inspire horrified expectance. They sprang to the charge, troop after troop, until the whole might of their squadron dashed forward beneath her to hurl itself upon that other mass which waited—or no, the cuirassiers, too, were in motion. Very slowly at first, at a walk, then at a trot, they began to move in advance.

The woman at the window gripped the sides of the casement with tense hands. The trot had become a gallop. The two bodies of horses were rushing toward one another, seeming to gather momentum at each swift succeeding leap of reaching hoofs. What would happen when those two opposing forces met? What madness was this to hurl flesh and blood against flesh and blood in so insane a fashion? Who could expect to survive the crushing grind of contact, or, passing that, to escape the slash of sabers, or the lash of frenzied hoofs?

And still she watched, chained by the very numbing horror of the thing impending. Closer and closer the two squadrons rushed—nearer and nearer. Would they meet? Would they not falter at the very last and, swerving aside, refuse that final impact? No! On and on! Horses and men!

Merciful God, they were face to face! Oh mothers of men, they were together! Unable to endure that final sight of contact, Jacqueline covered her face with her hands and screamed aloud.

How long she stood there, shaken as by a chill, the vision shut out yet picturing itself none the less in her brain, she did not know. The grind of the machine-guns, the din of shells still went on half perceived. And after a time, very slowly, she lowered her screening hands and as one acting against her will looked out.

The two squadrons seemed to her straining vision to have become inextricably mingled in a struggling mass of confusion which writhed and surged and suddenly split into smaller groups that still struggled, until without warning, the whole scene shifted and the black dolmans reeled back and streamed off across the countryside with the blue and red in pursuit.

Of a sudden she realized that the shell fire too had diminished. She tore her eyes from the horsemen. Once more the *kepis* were charging. She caught the gleam of steel as their bayonets flashed. From the trenches down there the gray men popped like rabbits from furz and ran stooping and lurching and falling, one here, one there as they ran. A group of them turned off and lumbered directly beneath her window. She saw their heavy faces smudged and soiled and distorted. Their heavy boots thudded harshly as they ran. Now and then one of their number or another paused to fire a shot and turned once more and ran on.

The trenches were full of red *kepis*. They swarmed up and over. A company turned and ran in pursuit of the men who had passed beneath her.

A passionate elation filled her. She ran back into the room and tore down a French flag which hung on her wall. She dashed back and leaned from the window to shake it toward the advancing *kepis*.

"*Vive l'Armée! Vive la France!*" she cried in an unrestrained abandon of rejoicing.

They looked up at the sound. They saw her. Their faces brightened. The young lieutenant who ran at their head took off his cap and waved it at her, and, yes, he laughed—laughed up in her face with a gleam of teeth and ran on around the end of the château.

She lifted her eyes. Far over there, more infantry appeared, and a steaming auto, tearing toward her. A French flag flapped above it, whipping out in the wind of its flight.

She turned and ran out and down the stairs and out into the courtyard to pause abruptly at the sight of Pierre and little Jean, huddled down against the west wall close by a little door. They had been released, then. She waved her hand and they rose and came to her.

She went down the steps and out to the gate. Like a body-guard they followed behind. Off there to the east, the red-and-blue line still pursued the retreating line of gray.

The auto she had seen whipped about the

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corner of the wall and drew to a steaming stop. A man in a red-and-gold cap, blue-black tunic, and red trousers caught into the tops of leather puttees, hopped out, gave one glance to the woman, the man and the boy and removed his cap.

"*Salut*, mademoiselle," he cried, striding toward her. "I bring you release—I, Major Jacques Martout."

"And I give you welcome from my very heart," Jacqueline made answer, extending her hand.

As he bent above it, she saw that his dark hair was shot with gray. Like so many of the men of command in the Armageddon, he was past middle age. Her eyes misted momentarily as she thought of her own absent father.

"Had I known such a welcome awaited, I had pressed the attack even more briskly," said the Major. "But who would have looked for a vision inside these frowning walls? They tell me it is Château Chinault."

"And Mademoiselle Chinault who bids you enter, Major."

Martouts's eyes widened with pleasure.

"*Dieu!* Mademoiselle, I know your father. I am thrice happy to bring succor to the child of a brother in arms."

"Will you not come inside?" Jacqueline suggested. "The Germans left something, thanks to your timely arrival. At least let me offer you refreshment."

Martout smiled dryly.

"I intend to come in. My *piou-pious* will be back after a time. My orders merely embraced taking and holding the château. There will, however, be considerable to do, and I fear you'll have to put up with us for a time, mademoiselle. I think your father had a sister—is she also here with you?"

"She is inside," Jacqueline told him.

"When I have attended to details, I must pay my devoirs," said Martout.

They passed inside the courtyard. The Major swept it with his eyes. His smile became a grin.

"*Dieu!* Our shells appear to have reached them nicely," he made satisfied comment, paused and was serious on the instant. "But I regret the necessity of training them against your home, little lady."

Jacqueline smiled. Her heart warmed to his gruff kindliness of tone and manner, so like that of the man she called father. Walking beside him, she seemed to breathe freely again for the first time since the morning before. She threw her head up proudly.

"Major, what is a poor house to give to one's country, when so many are giving their lives?"

The soldier gave her an admiring glance and nodded.

"Hah! What indeed, mademoiselle? You have spirit—*the* spirit. But—I see. You are a soldier's daughter."

Her bosom heaved.

"I—I saw them die—down there," she faltered. "I—I watched. It was grand—but it was awful. They staggered and fell, but the rest came on. And the cavalry—the cuirassiers — that — that was awful. Dear God, why must we war?"

Martout shrugged.

"Just now we must war to live—as a nation," he said.

A second auto pounded up outside. Martout paused and waited while several other officers came in through the gate. He went to meet them, stood and conversed for several minutes. A company of infantry appeared, marched in and stacked their guns on the flagstones of the court. While Jacqueline watched them, smiling, Martout came back.

"Mademoiselle, will it be possible to let me have a room where I can talk things over with my men, until we get matters straightened out?" he inquired.

Jacqueline turned her smile to him and nodded assent to his question.

"There is one the German commander used for a similar purpose. And last night he slept in a bed upstairs. I imagine you turned him out when you attacked."

Martout's eyes twinkled.

"Turn out and turn about is the fortune of war," he said dryly. "If you will show me this room——"

They ascended the steps to the door. Martout paused there abruptly. His keen eyes inspected the words chalked upon it. He turned them to his companion.

"What's this?" he exclaimed.

"Our guarantee of safety from German despoiling," Jacqueline flashed out, laughing slightly. "Colonel Fredreich wrote it himself and signed it, just before he departed so early this morning."

Martout snorted.

"Colonel Fredreich indeed! Were that the fellow's name, why has he signed this thing with a wholly different initial?"

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He frowned and bit his lips in what seemed vexation. Mlle. Chinault looked a trifle confused.

"Why—I hadn't noticed how he signed it. I had no reason to doubt his name. I thought him the commander of the forces which seized the château."

Martout nodded.

"So he was, and of a good many others."

The girl flushed and paled quickly.

"*Mon Dieu*, Major! Just what do you mean?"

"That I am positive Colonel Fredreich was a title assumed; that we were close to making an important capture, had we but known of his presence. Your self-invited guest was a man of considerably higher rank than a colonel, unless I mistake, mademoiselle—a commander of one of their armies, as these words lead me to suppose. Mademoiselle, I think you entertained a very high official unawares—one they could ill afford to lose, these Germans—one I would have given my life to take," Martout shrugged.

The helmet of a cuirassier appeared under the arch of the gate. His horse was reeking and the face of the rider was streaked with dust and perspiration, but he rode forward in a manner almost jaunty, glanced about briefly, waved a hand at the infantry column and wheeled as if satisfied with what he saw.

"Devils," said Martout in an admiring tone. "Devils. Did you see them give the hussars a touching-up?"

Some of the color left Jacqueline's face.

"Don't," she protested, and shuddered. She led the way inside and straight to the dining-room door. "The quondam Colonel Fredreich's headquarters an hour ago, and now yours," she announced as she opened it wide.

A quizzical smile twitched the Major's lips.

"At least the man has the nerve of the devil to venture this far forward. Still—Fitzmaurice said he suspected it was his command, because of the Bavarian troops."

Jacqueline wheeled upon him.

"Fitzmaurice—Lieutenant Maurice Fitzmaurice? You know him, Major? Where is he now?"

Martout broke out laughing.

"*Par bleu!* Yes. We both know him, Mademoiselle. You're the girl who helped him escape!" he shouted. "Now I see it. He told me about that. As to where he is at present, I don't just know. He was up in the air over your sweet head when we attacked."

"In—in that aeroplane?" stammered the girl.

"But yes, my dear. He was giving us the range to shoot to pieces your dwelling. I suspect he is now dogging the retreat to see how far it goes. And now that I know where I am to be quartered, if I could beg a bottle of wine—I think you said there was a little left."

"I—I will get it myself, at once," said Jacqueline quickly.

Just what was the matter, she scarcely knew, but her cheeks were burning as she made her way to find Marthe and send her into the cellars for the wine. Yet the sensations she experienced were not in the least unpleasant, rather they were pleasurable, in fact.

Lieutenant Fitzmaurice had been in that 'plane she had sighted, it seemed. Well, he had said he might come back. Of course she had hardly expected it in just the fashion it had happened—that he would direct the fire of the guns against her home. Still, what had she said about that to Major Martout? She smiled. After all, the shells had done little damage. She wondered how she might have felt, however, had she known it was the young English lieutenant who circled above her head in the 'plane.

She burst into the kitchen and ran on into the room where she had left Marthe and her aunt.

"Glorious news!" she exulted. "They are all gone, and Major Martout, who knows father, is up-stairs asking for a bottle of wine. Run, Marthe, and bring several bottles and get some glasses."

The servant hurried out. Jacqueline dropped down on the bed and recounted all to Madame St. Die.

"And the young English lieutenant who was here yesterday morning was the one who directed the firing," she ran on. "He flew up and gave them the range and now he is following the retreat to see where it goes. Perhaps he will come back here—who knows?"

She sprang up and crossed to a cheap mirror over an old bureau, where Marthe sometimes arranged her hair, to begin a rapid adjustment of her own dark tresses. In the polished surface she caught sight of her aunt's face behind her, wearing a shrewd sort of questioning smile. Without any real

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reason, she found herself flushing again as she had on her way down on her errand for Martout. Now if only Marthe would come with the Major's wine. Ah, there she was.

She ran to the kitchen, took the bottles and arranged them with glasses on a tray. Carrying them before her she went back to the upper hall, pushed open the rear dining-room door and entered. Martout and several other officers, both of infantry and the cuirassiers, were already seated about the table. They rose as she came in.

She served the wine, was presented in quite a paternal fashion by the Major to the others, and suggested serving them luncheon, meeting with an immediate acceptance, which left little doubt of how grateful her offer was.

Despite the crowded events, it was still mid-morning as she regained the hall. She went out to the court, where the dead horse and the wrecked autos and cycles had been cleared away. The infantry still clustered there in rows and chattering groups. She remembered the burning house of Marie Senlis and conceived the notion of going down to see how the woman and her children might have fared. Crossing to the little door in the west wall, she let herself through.

She stood in the fields beyond the wall. She found that even while she had been getting the wine for the Major, things had moved. Down there in the fields beyond the trenches, a covered wagon or two bearing the Geneva flag were moving slowly, gathering here and there the wearer of one of those fallen red *kepis* which looked so much like a poppy at a distance.

Nearer, at the trenches themselves, men detailed for the purpose were laying bodies in the long ditch and pushing back above them the little ridge of fresh-turned soil, which the Germans had thrown up. With a grip in her heart, she realized this hasty burial of the dead—grim aftermath of war.

Then, while she stood undecided whether to go on to the burned house, or down to those wagons to offer any assistance she might, or to turn back and make her offer of care for the wounded to the Major himself, from high above her came a growing drumming, like the sound of a cane run quickly down a line of metal palings. With surprising quickness it grew in volume.

She lifted her eyes. They encountered a great shape moving swiftly toward her, its exhaust rattling a staccato announcement of its approach. In the same instant that she placed it, the machine circled, its motor died, it dipped sharply, started up again when seemingly dashing to destruction, tilted once more in a lesser slant and came lightly to ground not twenty feet away.

The pilot released his levers, rose and prepared to leave the machine.

"Good morning," he said in English. "I appear to have formed the habit of dropping down on you."

"Lieutenant Fitzmaurice!" cried Jacqueline, her face flushing in quite unreasoning fashion, all thought of death and burial driven momentarily away before the approach of strong, vibrant life.

Fitzmaurice removed his goggles and advanced to meet her.

"Quite so. I told you I'd try and come back," he replied.

VI

JACQUELINE put out her hand. Fitzmaurice took it. So for a moment man and maid stood facing one another. The day had brightened. There was sunlight in the air. A gentle breeze fanned about them, moving the draperies of the woman slightly, bending the grass in the fields and setting the real red poppies to flaunting their scarlet heads. The old château stood bathed in the light as a background, with its walls, its trees beyond it and its towers. The man cased in leather, his helmet still showing but the oval of his face, bulked large in the picture. So might some fair ancestress of Jacqueline Chinault, in those days when the structure behind her was not old, but a strong keep of feudal power, have dallied in this very field with a sturdy kmight in armor, sworn by the cross of his sword-hilt to valorous deeds in its and her defense. Save for the ultra-modern shape of the huge Bleriot monoplane resting on its rubber-shod wheels it was all in proper drawing.

Inspired by a spirit of perverseness, purely feminine in type, Jacqueline looked down and took away her hand.

"But I hardly looked for you to return as you did, pointing the guns which threw shells at my poor home."

Fitzmaurice's face fell. The light died out of his eyes. He pressed his lips together quickly.

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"I know," he said a trifle stiffly. "And I want you to know that I hated the job. And all the time I was up there I was thinking of you and hoping—hoping you were safe—that you might have some place to hide in case the worst happened. Still, it must have seemed a poor return to you for saving my liberty—perhaps my life. I don't blame——"

Jacqueline threw up her head, caught the sleeve of his coat in her fingers.

"Stop!" She stamped her foot to emphasize the word. "Don't let me fool you. I am not angry, and I didn't hide. I—I watched you from a window."

"Jove!" Fitzmaurice looked sheepish. "You did—really? I say——"

"And," the girl went on with just a tone of pique, "I should think you would know that if it were necessary for France to destroy my home—rend it stone from stone, I would not refuse it. I would *not!* Not if it were for France!"

"No more, I fancy, you wouldn't," said Fitzmaurice rather vaguely and in some confusion. "You're—you're just about the nerviest girl I've ever chanced to meet. I said as much to the Major, yesterday, you know. And that reminds me, I've got to see him and make my report. But couldn't I see you a bit after? I left in such a deuced hurry yesterday morning."

Jacqueline smiled.

"Come," she offered. "I will show you where to find him. I was going down to see one of the women whose cottage was burned this morning and rather lost heart when I saw that." She waved her hand down toward the trench.

"It is a bit awful," Fitzmaurice admitted after a glance. "But, now that we're in it, what can we do?"

"Come," she repeated, shaking her head. "You must report."

She began retracing her steps toward the little door in the wall.

Fitzmaurice paused merely long enough to speak a word of direction to his mechanic, ere he trailed after his guide. Once more he felt himself thrilled by her beauty, her spirit, her bearing. That imperious little stamp of her foot had fallen not only on the grass but on his heart and set his pulses to hammering in an odd fashion.

She was strong, superbly alive. More than once since it happened, he had thought of the grip of her hands on the propeller of the Bleriot the previous morning. In a dim way he began to feel he had never encountered any one like her among all the women he had known as boy and man; that he had already, after a second meeting, surrendered to her charm and given her a place in his mind apart from all other women; that there really *was* no other woman just like her; that she was, well, just herself—just that, and . . .

"The Major said you were probably scouting over the retreat," her voice came back over the shoulder, cutting into his floundering thoughts. "Dare you tell me how far they went?"

"About ten kilos before I left them," he responded. "They fell back in excellent order, but came near making a record for the distance." He smiled slightly at the last.

They reached the door in the wall. Fitzmaurice set it open. She led him across the court and up the steps and into the hall where a sentry was now posted by the dining-room door.

"Go make your report in there," she suggested. "If you would like to go down with me to see the woman whose house was burned, after you are through, I will wait."

Fitzmaurice flushed with pleasure.

"I'll see you don't wait long," he accepted.

"And say to the Major that if I can do anything for the wounded, he need only suggest."

"Right!" Fitzmaurice nodded, strode to the door and spoke to the sentry.

The man opened the door. The lieutenant entered.

Jacqueline waited. She felt happy. The courtyard was full of red-and-blue-clad men. Beyond the château, as she had seen when out in the field, the cuirassiers were feeding their horses, with Pierre and Jean hanging about and talking to the men. Pierre and Jean were safe. Major Martout and the other men were in the dining-room at their duties. And Maurice Fitzmaurice had come back. He had a way of drawling at times in his speech, she found amusing, so she smiled. He had a strong face, but strong with a brave, kindly strength—not cold, cynical, at times actually cruel.

She caught herself up. She flexed her arms, forcing her hands up into her armpits and yawned, stretching her young muscles with a delightful sense of relaxation

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and freedom in the act. And she remembered the soldier suddenly as she did so, and glanced about to find him also smiling. He was a young fellow, seemingly in the twenties. Jacqueline returned his smile. The sentry grinned back.

She felt friendly, for some reason not just considered.

"I saw you drive them out," she said. "I watched you."

"I know, mademoiselle," he returned. "I was in Lieutenant Marchand's company. We ran beneath your window. If we had known you watched, we would have driven them out sooner. Nothing could have stopped us, on my word as a soldier."

"You are a nice boy," she retorted. "Have you a sweetheart?"

"But yes." He threw up his head. "Mimi. She wept when I was called. See." He threw open the long blue coat with its pinned-back skirts, and pointed with pride to a picture in a cheap gilt circle, fixed to the breast of his coarse shirt. "She goes with me to victory. When we have won—I shall go to her."

The knob rattled behind him. He straightened. The door opened. Fitzmaurice came out smiling.

"And now," he began at once, "I have nothing to do, for the present at least. Let's go see the poor woman who lost her home. And about the wounded: The Major says there are not many and he is having them sent back to the hospital base at once."

Jacqueline nodded and turned toward the door. Her heart was full of the simple little romance she had uncovered, of a girl's cheap picture over a lad's heart. Fitzmaurice had removed his helmet, which hung at his belt, and replaced it with a cap. Beneath it his face was young, strong, virile, smiling, like that of the sentry. The girl's heart warmed to its human appeal. Surely to such as these, she told herself, the victory belonged, would be given—must be given in the end. She led the way back across the court toward the little door.

Old Pierre himself was now in the courtyard. He caught sight of Fitzmaurice and hobbled forward in a limping haste.

"*Bon jour, monsieur,*" he mumbled, bowing. "*Nom d'un pip*, I never expected to see you alive again—me. Because of the petrol, they took my old neck and put about it a halter—mine and that of my grandson. We expected death any minute. For myself it did not so much matter, but the boy is young. You returned in good time."

Fitzmaurice's eyes leaped to those of his companion, and there was surprised confession in their depths. She nodded.

"Pierre and Jean were held as hostages," she explained, "but I do not think they were in any great danger. Colonel Fredreich held them rather as a precaution and to teach me his power."

"I certainly made you a lot of trouble," said Fitzmaurice. "But," he colored slightly, "if I hadn't I wouldn't have known you—would I?"

"It's all right, now you're here," Jacqueline returned and flushed brightly at the wholly unconsidered meaning of her words. "Pierre, go tell Marthe to prepare luncheon for the Major and his men. Stay and help her. Say I will be back before long myself. Come now, Lieutenant Fitzmaurice, we will go on if you don't mind. I must see the woman and get back quickly."

They passed through the door in the wall, and the man took his place at her side. So they went down across the fields, following a little path toward the cottages of the peasants, where the roofless house of Marie Senlis now smoked.

For a time neither spoke. The red cross wagons had driven off over the hills to the hospital, back there at the rear. The men at the trenches had given over their gruesome work.

Only the real red poppies starred the grass, nodding. But the man's eys dwelt on the woman's face and figure as they walked. By and by a sparkle of daring crept into their depths.

"Suppose you drop the Lieutenant," he remarked. "And, if you like, the Fitz also. My name's the same at both ends. First name Maurice, last part Maurice too. I think I told you that yesterday morning."

"Maurice—" she turned to face him—"that is French as well as English." Her eyes glinted brightly. "I rather like it, I think."

"So do I, the way you pronounce it. Do it again," he laughed in a way not quite certain.

"Maurice—Mau*rice*." Jacqueline's red lips were smiling like a reflection of that daring which had shone in his eyes. "It is

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stronger in English, but—prettier in French. Which do you prefer, monsieur—beauty or strength?"

"Both, when found together."

Again his glance embraced her figure. He chuckled.

"And—" Her eyes challenged now directly.

"You possess them. I can see you yet, twirling that propeller."

"Monsieur!" She flushed in a vivid wave of crimson.

"Gad!" said Fitzmaurice. "I sha'n't forget that—ever. Those beggars shooting, their bullets kicking up dust all around, and you there gripping the blades, tugging them around, not a bit frightened—just quietly doing what was needed, and behanged to the chaps. It was splendid!"

"Monsieur," said the girl, "your imagination makes much out of nothing, and—I think I was quite a good deal frightened, really. You see your fancy overshoots the case."

"Or falls short."

He strove to meet her eyes again and failed. Youth and life went on across the fields of death.

THEY reached the cottages to find Marie in the house of a neighbor, and in tears. Her little home was completely burned out. A shell had set it afire and she had rushed forth in a panic, dragging her babies. She had saved nothing.

Jacqueline softened. She became all woman. The finer human, compassionate side of her nature came into view. While Fitzmaurice stood by more or less embarrassed, she took the weeping peasant into her strong young arms and spoke sympathy and hope and promise of help into her ear. Perhaps it affected the man as nothing else could have done. After all, it is the eternal maternal, the wish to help and comfort, encourage and soothe which rouses man's highest ideal of his natural mate and keeps it alive. And because of the insight afforded him of this woman's soul, he was far more silent on the return up the path to the château, rousing only as they neared it.

"Jolly old place," he observed, then. "I've always had a fancy for old family manors and that sort of thing."

"It has been ours for five hundred years," said the girl. "Would you like to see about it?"

"Would I! Well, rather! Those old towers hold a fascination. One can imagine —oh, any number of things."

She nodded.

"Then after luncheon, which I must really go now and see about without more delay, I will show them to you."

"Right-o," Fitzmaurice accepted, with animation. "I'll go over and see what shape my mechanic finds the Bleriot in, then." He took off his cap. "Till after luncheon, mademoiselle."

Once more she nodded, smiling. He watched her vanish through the little door, stood and looked, after the door had shut behind her, and sighed, well-nigh outside of his volition, before starting toward the monoplane where it still sat on the grass.

And it was there old Pierre found him, bringing an invitation to the luncheon itself, at which Jacqueline presided, quite the little hostess of her country's soldiers. And it was from the luncheon directly, they passed out together to the courtyard, where the red and blue rank and file were also enjoying the bounty of the young châtelaine in bottles of red wine from the vaults of the château, with which to wash down their bread and sausage.

They went out across it and approached a narrow door in the foot of the western tower, its padlock now broken and hanging loose as the troopers of the hussars had left it, after their search of the day before.

They pushed it open, went in and found a narrow stairway which led up and up past floors where were various rooms, once full of the life of the place, but now filled with storage and odds and ends of cast-off things from the present dwelling across the court. Narrow slits in the thick walls let in bars of sunlight, where dust motes danced as they climbed. From them, perhaps, archers had once sent their arrows against an attacking foe. Cobwebs and silence held it now, save for the sound of their footfalls on the stairs.

"It's rather like climbing the inside of a chimney," said Fitzmaurice as they mounted. "Take out the floors and remove the top, and you'd have a huge sort of flue. And speaking of that, and my range-pointing exploit of this morning, do you know what they did in Belgium? In certain towns, German spies, planted beforehand,

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fired the spires of churches. They burned straight up, making a pillar of fire by night and of smoke by day, on which the range-finders took their distance. You know we don't aim at our target really in this war. We point our guns up at an angle determined by a mathematical calculation. That is why, if the real target is out of sight, an object above it becomes of so much service."

Jacqueline nodded.

"But isn't it a rather perilous task for the—object?"

"It's part of the game," said Fitzmaurice. "War isn't exactly a gentleman's game or pastime."

In the end they came out on a bare wooden floor, close up under the conical roof. Save for some boxes and bits of furniture, broken and cast aside, it was empty. But the sunlight streamed in through a final row of the narrow apertures in the tower sides, filling it with the light of the outer day.

"Jolly!" exclaimed Fitzmaurice after a first glance, picking up a chair with a broken arm, and blowing dust off its seat. "Sit down, Mademoiselle Chinault. You must be tired after that climb."

She took the seat with a shake of her head.

"I am not tired, really. I've climbed those stairs times without number. As a child I used to come up here and spend whole afternoons, time and again."

Fitzmaurice sat down on the side of an overturned box.

"What doing?" he asked.

Jacqueline smiled.

"Pretending," she said. "Making believe I was a sort of princess—one of those old ancestors of mine, when France was a mass of warring sections and battle a common occurrence. I would imagine that there was war and the château assailed; that I and a few trusted men-at-arms had been driven up here into the tower. I would walk about, run from porthole to porthole, encouraging my lusty fellows right royally to shoot fast and straight from their long-bows at the foe. Or, perhaps I would cry them on to a desperate resistance against an enemy who had forced the walls and gained the door of the tower and were seeking to storm the stairs.

"And," she smiled more brightly, with lighting eyes, carried back on the wave of recollection her words induced, "they really fought superbly, those make-believe heroes of mine. But they suffered—oh, yes. And then I bound up their bleeding wounds with my silken scarf. It was really wonderful what a lot of blood that silken scarf would stanch. I think, on looking back, that I must have had an imagination stocked with an inexhaustible supply of silken scarfs, for there was always a fresh one to hand."

She broke off and laughed in a somewhat nervous fashion.

"Did you ever pretend, monsieur—or are such things left for girls?"

The Lieutenant grinned.

"Who hasn't? Your sex has no monopoly of that trick. In fact, mademoiselle, I haven't altogether outgrown the habit yet, at times. Only now I call 'em 'day-dreams'—the things of make-believe."

Jacqueline nodded.

"I too," she confessed. "What are they—just fancies, or our hopes, our desires, our longings and aspirations, which we dare not put into words to others—these day-dreams we have when alone?"

Fitzmaurice shook his head.

"That's psychology, and beyond me," he rejoined. "But whatever they are, I don't wonder you had them up here. The place seems like one to inspire them. You feel it—all the history of the years since it was built—all the things which have happened. What stories its stones could tell of peace and war, victory and defeat, bravery and death, and life, and—love!"

He paused for a moment without meeting her eyes, then went on:

"I once read or heard it said, I forget which, that after a place has been inhabited by people for a long time, it actually takes on an atmosphere in sympathy with them—their character you know. It's like that—the air of this place. Something elusive, to be felt but not expressed, seems to lurk up here, waiting, waiting for some one to come and feel it. It's as if each one of those old forebears of yours, who lived here during all the hundreds of years, had left behind a little of his influence to go on building up an impression in the place, an atmosphere which speaks of strength and bravery and conscious pride of power, holding it locked up here through all the years, until it comes down and is felt by—us."

She nodded silent assent.

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"It's a sort of heritage you have," Fitzmaurice resumed, as if satisfied with her answer. "All those people seem to have left you a little bit of himself or herself. You can creep off up here and feel it, and it sorts of lifts you up, when you remember how they had their troubles and their joys, while they lived here and died and left the old tower still standing when they went away. It's a sort of shrine, that's what it is, and its history is still going on, still growing. Yesterday it was in the hands of an invader. Today once more its own people hold it."

He broke off and faced her, smiling.

"You see I have fancies too," he said.

The girl did not smile.

"Are they fancies?" she asked slowly. "I don't know. What you have put into words I have felt. As a child I did not realize it all when I sat here and watched the little specks of dust floating in those sunbeams just as they float now—as they have floated all the years. I just watched them and made believe.

"Later, as I grew older, I think I sensed something of what you have mentioned. There *is* an atmosphere about these towers, as if their silence was full of an invisible presence which spoke to my spirit of their lives and loves and made me just a bit sad, and just a bit glad that I am one of them at the last, and want to be worthy to—to bear the name as proudly as they did."

"Small doubt about that," said Fitzmaurice quickly and checked the sentence abruptly.

It came to him that this conversation was taking on a very intimate tone. That he should have spoken as he had in the past few minutes was surprising enough in itself. That he should have done so to a girl he had seen twice in his life was little short of amazing.

He rose and walked over to one of the narrow slits and looked out at a little piece of the far hills he could see. From behind him came no sound, yet he could picture the girl as plainly in his mental vision as he could the sunlit landscape before his eyes. There was a harmony, a rapprochement between her and himself, no less amazing than all his other actions since he had been with her.

Manlike he added a climax to it all. With the same abruptness which had characterized his last movement, he turned around and surprised her eyes with a strange expression, and a tiny smile on her lips. He sought to inject a lighter note into the situation.

"Come," he suggested, "let us make believe together. You shall be the Princess in the Tower—the—the Princess Jacqueline of course! And I—I shall be your true knight, sworn to serve and defend you ever. Now as it chanceth the tower is sore assailed and I have brought you here after desperate defense as a last refuge, where I shall make a final stand and guard thee with my trusty blade. And, by the way, where is my trusty blade? Still what matter? Imagination will transform the leg of a chair."

He caught up a loose spindle and brandished it in burlesque fashion. Jacqueline laughed, showing the pink of her mouth, beyond her red lips.

"Right loyally have ye served me, my good Sir—Sir Maurice," she retorted. "What though the foul foe howls below, need I fear while thy good right arm and chair-leg interpose 'twixt me and them?"

Fitzmaurice continuing his absurd antics succeeded in rapping one knuckle sharply with his make-believe sword, taking off a fleck of skin.

"What ho!" he howled. "See, Princess—I bleed. Quick with thy silken scarf and stanch my wound, that I may fight on to the finish."

He dashed toward her in simulated frenzy, sank upon one knee and thrust out the injured hand. She took it in her own slim fingers, which he knew were strong. The touch of them thrilled him through every fiber of his being.

Suddenly the make-believe was all gone and the real man knelt before the woman. The woman? Yes. In that swift instant, too short to reckon, the man knew that she *was*—the woman. That contact of flesh was the last thing needed to fire the thing which had been growing within him during all the last day.

His eyes leaped to her and found her head bent in apparent solicitude over his barked knuckle. He noted the wave of every tendril of dark hair, the soft line of her throat, the pure texture of its virgin surface.

The fingers of her other hand performed mystic passes over his wound.

"There, 'tis bound up, brave knight," she

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declaimed. "'Tis an honorable wound, won in most valiant service. Doth pain thee greatly?"

"Lady," he cried out, "thy touch hath healed it," and his tone was a bit too fervid —too surcharged with real emotion to pass unnoticed.

Her eyes came up and met his. The real man and the real woman looked one upon the other in that glance. Slowly, like the rising of a beautiful tide the red crept into Jacqueline's cheeks, up to her eyes, to the little separate roots of her hair, flooding all her young face with the crimson flood of awakening understanding.

Somewhere above their heads the scratch of a pigeon's claws came from the roof, and the crooning of its call. The sunshine still streamed through the slits now centuries old, where men had shot their arrows in the grim game of war. Little motes danced in their golden pathways, weaving strange varying patterns, in a ceaseless ebb and flow, like the very course of active, vibrant life in their restless motion.

War makes quick beginnings and quick endings. Mankind, when each swift succeeding moment may be the end of all things, makes little of convention. At the beginning of the Armageddon, many were married in a night and departed from their brides the following morning, to return, perhaps never—their marriage the mating of the *ephemeris*, which measures its life in a day. One seizes quickly when one may lose all save what is taken in the brief span of a breath.

The man knelt still before the girl in the old tower of her people. She was lovely—lovelier now than ever with that crimson tint in her face, which his own words had evoked. He moved closer without rising.

"Jacqueline—Jacqueline—Princess," he said very softly.

The crimson died from her cheeks and she went utterly white. Very slowly she once more lifted the eyes she had dropped before his first fervid glance. At first there was merely wonder in them as he read it, but a wonder changing by degrees to something he had never before seen in the eyes of woman—a soft, sweet answer to the yearning in his tone.

In a swift surge, Fitzmaurice rose upward and caught her to him, his arms about her body, drawing her up to his breast.

"Princess," he said again with a note like that first wonder in her eyes, and put down his face to her hair.

She yielded to him, relaxing within the circle of his arms. Above them still cooed the pigeon on the roof. About them the motes danced on in the sunshine. But they paid them no heed. Youth and life and love, shut in, gave no space to what went on around them.

Theirs was the one great moment. The great discovery was theirs, so old yet ever new. That one sublime instant was theirs to enjoy; that first message of eye to eye, of soul to soul; that first grip of eager hands; that first touch of lips, like which there is no other, or ever will be, because there is only one first.

"Maurice," whispered the girl within his arms.

"Yes — yes — dear?" Fitzmaurice answered her gently. "Maurice what?"

"Just that." She was looking up into his face, her hands gripping his arms, leaning back against his clasp now, the least bit. "Just Maurice." A little laugh bubbled up low in her throat. "Oh—isn't that enough?"

"Jacqueline, sweet!" He caught her closer. She freed herself gently after a moment.

"Do you suppose they know?" she questioned.

"They?"

"Yes." Her eyes were dark and wide. "Those others who are gone? Do you suppose in some way they are here all around us and look on, and see what has happened and—and smile?"

"Who knows?" said Fitzmaurice slowly. "If they do, I hope they approve."

Suddenly Jacqueline giggled.

"What—a funny ending to our—make-believe," she flashed, her eyes dancing with a wholly new light.

Fitzmaurice chuckled.

"By Jove, yes!"

The first moment was ended—gone to join that invisible band and add its quota to the mystic spell of the tower. But like its echo, the girl's next words came pensive.

"Approve? Ah, Maurice, I hope so. I am the last of my family. My father had no sons, and with me the name dies out." She lifted her eyes once more to his and smiled. "No matter—the make-believe has ended just as it should. The valiant knight has won the Princess and all is well—even though his sword was the leg of a

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chair, and his Princess but a maid of France."

"A maid of France," said Fitzmaurice. "Jacqueline, our love is a regular international alliance. And, I rather think, that's the first mention I've made of the fact that I love you. But——"

She seized him, laughing softly.

"But you speak so well in signs, my Maurice. Come—I must take you to my auntie. We must tell her. No doubt she will be very properly shocked, until she comes to know you better and love you as——"

She flushed and began pulling him toward the stairs. He dragged back.

"Say it," he demanded. "I won't go a jolly step, you know, until you do."

"Say what?" Her flush lingered, but her eyes were innocently wide.

"I do."

Jacqueline pouted. With a roguish shrug, she laughed.

"I do, I do, I do," she parroted quickly. "There now. Come along my—my British lion."

They turned from the little bars of sunshine to the tread of the steps. They started down slowly, as if loath to go. Down there was the every-day world of man, and up here only the sunshine and the motes dancing, and the old, old air of the place and themselves. Fitzmaurice slid an arm about her. They went down very close together.

"You must think me an awful boor not to have asked for your aunt before," said Fitzmaurice. "It was dreadfully rude of me, but I've—had so much to think of."

Jacqueline shot him a glance.

"So have I. But she really is much better. She actually seems to thrive on excitement. She told me just before luncheon that she intended to receive Major Martout, who knows my father, and give him a cup of tea. Perhaps we will be in time for some, if we hurry. That should appeal to you. What time is it anyway, Maurice?"

Fitzmaurice dug out his watch with his left hand, rather than change the position of his right.

"Nearly five. Jacqueline, we've been up here hours."

They looked at each other and they laughed. Into their laughter struck the sound of feet mounting toward them, coming closer and closer, as if some one were climbing quickly, urged up by the spur of haste.

Fitzmaurice shifted his arm from Jacqueline's waist to a steadying hold on her elbow. His eyes narrowed to alert attention. They went on down toward the sound of footsteps. Half way about the turn of the tower, a blue-and-red-clad figure came suddenly into view.

The soldier caught sight of them and paused, bringing his hand up in salute. He was panting slightly from his run up the stairs.

"Lieutenant Fitzmaurice," he said shortly, between gasps, "I am instructed to say—that Major Martout—desires your presence—in the courtyard—at once!"

VII

FITZMAURICE returned the soldier's salute.

"Say that I attend without delay."

The man turned and clattered down the stairs. Maurice tightened the pressure of his fingers on Jacqueline's arm and resumed the descent at a quickened pace. The contraction of his lids still persisted, bringing a new expression to his face from that which had held it all afternoon in the tower.

Something like fear began to rouse in the girl's eyes and spread to her face as they hurried down.

"What is it? Maurice, what is the matter?" she faltered, voicing her vague alarm.

"I don't know, of course," he told her. "I suppose Martout needs me for something or other."

They reached the lower door and emerged into the court.

"Ah!" said the Lieutenant.

One glance had been enough to tell him the reason for his summons. He released Jacqueline's elbow and pointed up and to the east.

There plainly in sight and coming toward them was a great thing against the sky. Its wide-stretched wings had a slight downward droop, which marked it for a military craft. Its tail-like rudder also slanted somewhat from the horizontal, and on its yellow belly was painted a short black cross. It was a *taube*, one of those aeroplane scouts which the Germans call

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"doves," and which always hover like birds of ill omen above their army's advance, to spy out what lies before.

Martout and a group of the other officers of the French force stood in the middle of the courtyard watching the *taube's* approach. Fitzmaurice left Jacqueline's side and made his way to them with quick strides. He brought his hand smartly to salute.

"Report myself, sir," he said.

Martout turned his head.

"Hah, Lieutenant! You see that fellow?"

He waved a pair of field-glasses at the German airship which now hovered over the valley.

"Yes, Major," Fitzmaurice nodded.

"I don't like it," Martout frowned. "It may mean anything or nothing. But the supports I was promised this morning have not come up, and I have had no word. That fellow may be merely after information or scouting the advance of a counter attack. Do you think you can find out?"

"I can try, sir."

"Good. But be careful, Lieutenant. Learn all you can, even as he is attempting, rather than trying merely his destruction. Slip by him and do a little scouting of your own, if you can. Fight if you must, of course, but—well, let him attack if he so elects. That is all."

Jacqueline heard. She had followed on Fitzmaurice's heels, edging in until she stood but a few steps behind him. She heard and realized the full import of the Major's words, while her heart leaped in a heavy, sickening pulse of dread anticipation.

She who had gone to the tower a girl, had returned as a wakened woman, with all the full woman's quickened intuitions and perceptions. Since that great moment up there where the sunshine filtered in through the long slits in the stone, she would never again be the same. The magic word which transforms the maid had been spoken. She had looked upon her mate and recognized his claim and surrendered herself to his keeping. And hardly had she done so than fate and the grim necessity of service threatened to tear him from her and send him into certain danger. All the new woman within her rose up and cried out in rebellion.

For a moment she closed her eyes, blotting out the sunlight and the great *taube* sailing swiftly through it. A throbbing ache seemed to grip her throat and make her want to cry out, even while it strangled her breath and her protest. She pressed her lips tightly and waited for what seemed to her like a sentence passed on the one she loved.

Fitzmaurice's voice came to her as from a long way off.

"Very well, Major, I understand fully. I shall go up at once."

The blow had fallen. She opened her eyes. He was turning away from the group which watched the *taube*—from her! The light which had filled his eyes up there in the tower was gone. They had grown hard, slightly narrowed, cold, bright. His whole attitude seemed changed, with all its boyish element hidden away. All at once he had become the human fighting unit of the vast machine of war. It amazed her and frightened her a little, and fascinated too.

His voice had been strong and vibrant when he accepted the order which would send him hundreds of feet into the air to do battle with that yellow monster with the short black cross on its breast. In his face there was no trace of fear, only intent purpose to accomplish the thing to which he was sent. After all, it was so she would want the man to whom she gave herself, to look in the face of danger—of possible death.

And he was hers—hers! As he turned she placed herself beside him. Her hand fell on his arm.

He started. It almost seemed to her that for the moment he had forgotten that he had left her there by the tower. And then he spoke with the masculine air of command for the woman he takes and holds from all others.

"Jacqueline! You mustn't stay out here you know, dear. That chap might drop a bomb."

She did not answer directly. The remark seemed utterly trivial to her. She was not thinking of herself. Of what moment were possible bombs when this man to whom she absolutely belonged—would always belong absolutely—was about to do battle with the grim "dove" sailing above them?

"You're—you're going up?" she faltered.

Fitzmaurice nodded.

"Major's orders," he returned promptly, moving toward the door in the wall, beyond which was his machine.

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She followed as he went quickly in its direction.

"I know—I heard," she said. "But—but—oh, Maurice—I've just found you."

Some of the keen intentness went out of the Englishman's face. His voice grew softer, more responsive.

"Sweetheart——"

She caught her breath in a long sigh.

"I know—I know. You're a soldier. This is an order—it must be. But I am a woman—and I love you, Maurice. Even the Major said to be careful. Promise you will be careful—for me."

They had reached the little door.

"I promise," said Fitzmaurice gently; she had grown more wonderful than ever in these hurried moments. "Don't worry, little girl. This is all in the day's work, you know. And you really must go back now into the house—where you'll be safe."

She shook her head.

"I'm going with you as far as I can. Come. Let me go as far as the machine. I'll—I'll—" she paused and seemed to struggle for repression before she went on—"come back after you are gone."

Circumstance drove Fitzmaurice. He dared not take time to argue.

"Come then," he yielded and darted through the door into the fields, running toward the great Bleriot beyond the wall.

His mechanic stood beside it, apparently waiting, as he ran up.

"All right, Dick?" Fitzmaurice cried.

The man nodded.

"Sweet she is, sir. I heard the Major send for you and got ready. We go up?"

"At once," said Fitzmaurice.

He detached his helmet and goggles from his belt and prepared to don them.

Jacqueline caught his arm. She lifted her face, all her woman's soul in her eyes.

"Kiss me," she panted. "Kiss me, Maurice—before you put those on."

Regardless of the staring mechanic, he took her briefly into his arms, straining her to his breast, bending his face to hers. The color had gone from her lips as he set his own to them, but they clung as if loath to yield from his touch.

Jacqueline sobbed once, shortly, with her mouth still to his. She tore herself away.

"Go!" she cried out fiercely. "Go; destroy the thing up there and come back to me!"

Suddenly she had flamed into the primitive woman, the primitive passion, standing back and crying her confidence in his ability to conquer—sending him from her to triumph and return.

FITZMAURICE gave her one final glance, jerked on his helmet and vaulted into his place. The mechanic came out of his shock of surprise at his officer's behavior and ran to the front. As Fitzmaurice set up spark and feed, he threw the great ash blades around and about.

The motor roared out. The mechanic ran back, as the great machine quivered and moved, and clambered up upon it. It trundled forward, faster and faster, bouncing a little as it gathered momentum, tilted, sank, tilted again and left the ground, rising up and up to enter the lists of the air, where the *taube* challenged.

Up, up, the woman watched it. Once more the fire of sex and race died down and only the dread for the one who rode higher and higher into danger remained. She stood in the field alone, her head bent backward, watching the swift mounting.

Up and up! The Bleriot reached the end of its first long slant and circled. It was coming back almost directly above her. The roar of its motor came down to her in a harsh, grinding rattle and passed.

Abruptly the girl turned from her watching and began to run back across the field toward the château. She ran blindly, stumbling over the grass roots, her breath catching now and then in something between a gasp and a sob. The primitive flame was quite banked now and she was only a girl, and afraid. She reached the little door and ran through it to the courtyard.

Martout still stood there, surrounded by his men. The infantry soldiers had left off their milder amusements and were gathered here and there in groups, craning their necks to witness the aerial duel. They stood like children, with open mouths and expectant faces. The time which had been so full of love's agony to Jacqueline, had been but a scant few minutes to these men inured to the sudden scene-shifts of warfare. The interval between Fitzmaurice's turning away and the first fusillade of his motor had been no more than the space necessary for starting, to them.

Realizing all this dimly, she went slowly

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across the court and up the few steps to the door. And there she paused. She could not go farther—she could not enter until the issue was decided. She stopped on the last step, turned her head slowly backward and lifted her gaze in dull dread to the sky.

The *taube's* pilot had sighted his enemy rising. Jacqueline, seeking for him with anxious eyes, found that he had banked and begun to circle. The yellow monster with its black-barred breast swam in steadily mounting spirals like a huge vulture, seeking to gain the advantage of elevation from which to strike the Bleriot, which had now taken to circling also.

Round and round went the great artificial birds, climbing higher and higher through the sun-lighted heavens, jockeying for position, before making any overt move, one against the other. So might two hostile rocs, in dim ages of the world, have circled over some cup-like prehistoric valley before they locked in deadly combat in mid-air. One of the woman's hands crept up and lay against her left breast, over her heart, while she stood on the steps and waited for what was to come.

A wisp of hair loosened and fell across her eyes. She threw it back in a swift gesture. She was breathing slowly, yet with an actual heave of shoulders in each respiration. Her lips were parted, her eyes dark, full of horrified staring.

A step sounded beside her. Martout's gruff voice struck half-heeded on her ears. He had noticed the interplay between her and Fitzmaurice as the Lieutenant had turned after hearing his orders, and he had lived long enough to read other things than words, and he was French to the core.

"Mademoiselle," he said kindly, "you are pale. Would you best watch? Would you not be better inside?"

She shook her head without glancing in his direction. Her eyes, her soul, were focused on the two great engines which still climbed up and up above her. Yet she sensed his words and was grateful for his interest. He was a man far older than she, and he knew her father. For a moment, it seemed almost as if he stood to her in the place of the absent parent. Her lips moved.

"I love him—I love him," she repeated, as if sure he would understand.

Martout expressed no wonder. He moved closer. His hand slipped under her arm in support.

"Don't be afraid, dear maid," he encouraged. "The boy knows his business if any one does. He'll come through all right. Hah! What did I tell you?"

The Bleriot had darted in. Like a hawk striking, it turned from its spiral whirling and plunged straight at the yellow *taube*, yet slanting somewhat upward as it flew. The paths of the two machines crossed and the German swung off slightly to escape what seemed a certain collision.

There was a sudden, quick flash from the French 'plane as they passed and then it was off and turning again to resume its circles. And it seemed to Jacqueline that it had gained in elevation and rode a bit higher than the "dove."

"Clever, that," said Martout, squeezing her arm in his hand. "He made the fellow dodge and gained the advantage on him. Now watch. You'll be proud of him when this is finished."

Some of the tense strain went out of her body. For the first time, she turned her face briefly to her companion.

"He's higher up than the other, isn't he?" she questioned.

"Yes. That's where he should be," Martout nodded. "Now watch."

The Bleriot was still spinning circles of air, high up, and the great *taube* seemed trying to regain what had been wrested from it by mounting also. It was climbing quickly, too, but in a wider circle than the Bleriot used. Abruptly the latter swung out, however, and instead of a circle, described a figure of eight. In so doing, it crossed directly above the path of its foeman.

Again came a stabbing flash from its body as it darted over. The *taube* lurched slightly in a quick response. From it, too, stabbed little jets of flame, half seen in the late light of the afternoon.

The Bleriot swung out far to one side, turned and headed back to the attack. The *taube* gave over its attempt to mount above its antagonist and darted off to one side itself. More shots flashed from its body. Their crackle drifted down thin, almost vanished ere they reached the ear.

But the *taube* had gained some distance. To one side it now turned in a longer rising arc to gain the level of the other craft, still swimming somewhat above it.

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To the woman watching, there came a recollection of a Japanese print she had once seen, depicting the struggle between two hostile kites, which hovered one over the other and struck with wings and talons and beaks. There seemed something like that in this aerial contest between the Bleriot, lithe, hawklike, and the drooping winged "dove." It came to her that each typified the race which had brought it into being: the one agile, quicker of control and motion; the other partaking more of the sturdiness of its builders, somewhat slower in action, but dogged to a degree in its steady persistency of purpose.

The *taube* mounted in a long, reaching circle. The Bleriot checked its rush swiftly and turned. Once more it charged to intercept the course of the German in a headlong rush. Unexpectedly, however, it sheered off, slanting slightly so that instead of heading the other machine, it shot in behind it.

Jacqueline felt the hand of the man who held her arm contract on her flesh. She heard him suck in his breath in a sibilant hissing of understanding and expectation. Dimly she heard a staccato chatter like the explosion of a package of small crackers, falling all about her, and then Martout's voice full of exultation:

"*Nom du nom!* He got at him with his quickfire. *Dieu!* Look!"

The great yellow "dove" lurched like a wounded creature. Full in mid-heaven it staggered and seemed to lose headway and sink back like an exhausted climber. Recovering itself quickly, however, after that sickening moment, it headed away on a long tangent. But it no longer mounted. In fact, it seemed to the girl who watched that it sank even somewhat lower yet, before it caught itself fully and turned completely away in what appeared an effort at escape.

And the Bleriot fled after. Like literal dove and hawk now, the two machines darted off toward the eastern hills, the one pursuing, the other in a long reach across the sky. And the Bleriot seemed the faster. The hawk was overtaking the dove in each swift succeeding moment.

Fire again stabbed from the front machine. Again came the queer, faint popping, like the powder toys of children. And again the Bleriot replied in kind.

Again the *taube* staggered. Only this time it seemed unable to rise above its wounds. Its stagger became a dizzy swaying. It lurched this way and that, as if beyond all control. In the end it tilted on edge, till it hung like a great wide-finned flying fish in the air, trembled, quivered and turned completely over. Two little dark specks fell away from its distorted outline, and dropped swiftly downward. The *taube* hovered for yet a moment and then plunged after, whirling, turning, twisting in its fall.

And the thing which had slain it, the Bleriot, without pause or check, fled on toward the hills to the north and east, to learn what lay behind them and bring back the word.

For the first time that afternoon, as it seemed to her, Jacqueline became conscious of the fact that, as on the day before, the grim guns grumbled and fretted on beyond the horizon. They came almost as a requiem for the great dove and the little black dots which had fallen from it just before it, too, fell. And dimly she heard the pound of hoofs, as a troop of cuirassiers dashed off toward the spot where men and machine had fallen.

"HE had him well," Martout's voice buzzed in her ears.

In fact, everything was buzzing. A sense of deadly sickness was rising up and making her terribly faint. She thought she turned her head so as to face the Major. His face was strangely blurred, like a face seen through rippling water. And what was this choking stuff in her throat? And why were her eyes closed when she was trying to see the Major? How could one see anything when one's eyes were closed? Well, now that she realized that they were closed, she would open them, even though their lids weighed so heavy. Oh, there was the Major now!

He bent above her. His arm was about her and she was in a chair, and he had a wine-glass at her lips, and there was wine running down her neck inside her dress and wetting her body with tiny cold trickles across the skin of her chest. She struggled to sit up and looked about her.

She was in the dining-room. *Mon Dieu!* Had she fainted? The blood surged back into her face in a reactionary flood.

"Major!" she faltered. "Forgive me. I—I don't know how it happened. I—oh, I am ashamed."

Martout set his glass of wine on the table.

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"*Nom sacrê!*" he swore. "You have nothing to be ashamed of. You are a brave woman, my child. Fitzmaurice is infernally lucky to win a girl like you and then pull off a thing like this before her eyes. Hah! Were I twenty years younger, I'd give him a race, the rascal. *En vérité!*"

Jacqueline staggered up, holding on to the back of the chair.

"It was good of you to take care of me," she said, and forced a smile to her lips. "I'm quite all right now, Major. I—I think it's been everything the last two days, was the matter. They've been rather trying. I—I think I'll go now to my aunt."

Martout nodded.

"A fine lady," he made answer. "I paid my respects while you children played in the tower. A woman of spirit. Good blood in the Chinault."

"I shall go tell her what has happened," Jacqueline reaffirmed.

"Do," said the Major. "You will feel better, believe me. Two can bear either joy or sorrow so much better than one."

He bowed and retired through the door.

Jacqueline waited until he was gone, lifted the glass of wine and drained it. Safe! *He* was safe! Her heart resumed more its normal beating, sending the rich blood of youth through artery and vein. Her eyes began to sparkle darkly.

She smiled. Her man had conquered! By and by he would be coming back from his errand to her arms. She would, as she had said to the Major, go down and tell her aunt all that had happened. All? She flushed again as she followed the Major's footsteps to the door, and into the hall.

How would her aunt receive the information? Would she be surprised? There was that shrewd glance she had seen in Marthe's little mirror that morning.

She found Pierre and little Jean in the kitchen, drew the former aside and sent him on an errand, which was, after all, but to go outside and watch for the first sign of the Bleriot's return. Then she went over and opened the door to Marthe's room and went in, closing the door behind her.

Marthe was with the little old lady. Jacqueline waved her away.

"I wish to speak with my aunt," she said.

Marthe departed.

Youth and age looked into each other's eyes. Both were women. Youth went to its knees before age, laying its flushed cheek on the counterpane of the bed and taking fast hold of the hand of age.

"Auntie," murmured the girl. "Auntie dear."

Age took away its hand, lifted itself and placed both palms on the face of youth, forcing it up until once more it could look into those other eyes. For a time it said nothing, then it nodded and sighed:

"You left me a child—you come back a woman. There is something new in your eyes, my dear one. You have lived one of life's great moments since you left me, of which a woman has three—the day when she knows that she loves a man—the day of her marriage to him—and the day when she knows that by him she has conceived of a child. Speak—tell me. Once I too was young."

And youth with the hand of age in its own, its other hand on her hair, faltered out the tale of the tower and all which followed, and how it had watched, and what it had feared, and what it had hoped, and how it all had ended, and how now it was waiting for the Bleriot to return and had sent Pierre out to watch.

Youth lifted her face.

"Oh," she cried. "It was dreadful—my heart died within me. And then—then it was all over. The *taube* fell, whirling over and over. And Maurice—ah, Maurice had won!"

She sprang up, throwing her arms out wide in a gesture, dropping them to clasp her fingers before her and stand with eyes half closed, lips half parted, head slightly back.

"Youth," said her aunt. "Ah, dear youth! Come here, my child."

Jacqueline crept back to her side. The arms of age went around her, drew her close. The lips of age sought her cheek and pressed it.

"When he comes back, you must bring this man of yours to me," said age. "I want to look into his eyes as I have into yours. We have been a proud race, we Chinaults, of which you are the last. And so—well, bring him to me. I would see the man who can win you in twenty-four hours and bring that light to your face."

Jacqueline's arms crept about the frailer figure. Her face dropped on the slender shoulder.

"Auntie," she whispered. "Oh, Auntie, dear——"

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Pierre quavered from beyond the door:

"Mademoiselle—it comes—the big machine. It flies toward the château like a pigeon."

Jacqueline freed herself and sprang up.

"So soon as I may, I will bring him," she promised. "And, oh, auntie, you must love him—you must! Because—because—don't you like the name of Fitzmaurice?"

Madame St. Die sniffed.

"You've reached that stage, have you?" she inquired dryly. "You've been saying it over, have you—Jacqueline Fitzmaurice—just to see how it would sound? Go. You're on pins and needles. But bring him back here. A—a cat may look at a king, I suppose?"

"But," said the girl, "she mustn't claw him."

She turned to run from the room. She lost no time in going back through the house, but ran straight out from the kitchen door to the fields beyond, lifting her eyes for a sight of the Bleriot's returning.

High up, it was already slanting downward in a long dive. It fell swiftly, caught, tilted up somewhat from its own momentum, dipped again with complete grace and slid down to its landing, while she still ran on to meet it.

Fitzmaurice sprang out and started to meet her. He caught her hands outstretched and drew her to him, circled her with his arms. She lay with her hands on his breast, her head a little back, smiling into his face.

"Maurice," she half sobbed, "my brave one— You conquered. It was dreadful. My blood turned to water and then to fire."

Fitzmaurice threw back his helmet and kissed her. He caught her again by the hand.

"Come, dear, I must get to the Major," he admonished. "He won't like what I have to tell him, but he's got to hear it."

She ran like a child in his leading toward the château, not speaking but keeping pace. Through the little door in the wall they plunged, and once more her companion released her and went toward Martout and his associate commanders, where they were clustered on the steps.

But though she walked alone now, Jacqueline followed. She was in time to catch Fitzmaurice's report.

"An apparent advance in force," were the words which caught her ears as she approached.

The Major frowned.

"Name of a dog?" he growled. "Why have not my own supports come up? Where are the reenforcements which they promised to me this morning? Hold the château, they said. But how hold it? Gentlemen," he suddenly included the officers about him, "you have heard. We have a regiment of foot, a few guns and some cuirassiers. What can we do against this mass of superior numbers? We can fight, of course—we can die or be captured. Either way that is a loss to France. Or we can retire on our support, wherever it is—and perhaps return later. Fitzmaurice, you saw nothing of our missing reenforcements while you were up?"

"No, Major," the Lieutenant replied.

Martout made no further comment. He stood in deep consideration, his features drawn into lines of serious portent. The men about him voiced no opinion at the moment. Like his own, however, their faces showed the gravity of the situation.

Fitzmaurice turned to Jacqueline behind him.

"Did you hear?" he said in a lowered tone. "If we retire or not, you can't stay here to meet what will come. There must be no repetition of yesterday morning. You must get your aunt dressed and be ready to go—there will be time to arrange it. I'll fix it with the Major for you to go in one of the autos when we leave, or have one to use if we don't. You'll go for me, won't you, dear?"

She turned her eyes about the courtyard. Life with her was coming to be a thing of swift transitions. This was her home, where she had lived the bulk of her life. Till the day before she had given little thought to really leaving it and going anywhere else. Now this strange, strong man of hers was calling her away. He had come into her life but the day before and already had made her life his. Womanlike, she answered the call—

"I will go anywhere—with you—or for you, Maurice."

She moved to one side slightly, in order to pass behind the group of sober-faced men on the steps.

Martout appeared to reach some definite decision. He came out of his abstraction and lifted his head.

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"One moment," he said almost sharply. "Where are you going, mademoiselle?"

Jacqueline arrested her steps to answer: "To my aunt, Major. I scarcely think that I care to remain to receive Colonel Fredreich Wilhelm again. If you depart, I would rather go also and take my aunt."

"Wait," said the Major, and again addressed the men about him. "Gentlemen, allow me to suggest that we adjourn to the house. There is a matter about which I wish to consult both Mademoiselle Chinault and you."

VIII

HE offered no further explanation as he led the way inside, down the hall to the door of the dining-room and through it; nor did any of those who followed venture an expression of opinion as for what he was inviting them to this consultation. If their features showed forth something of surprise, they at least maintained silence throughout the distance between the steps and the inside of the château.

Something like a frown grew on the face of Fitzmaurice, however. There was something about the words of the commandant which gave him an uneasy feeling. His action had been too pointedly connected with Jacqueline's move to prepare her aunt for removal at his own suggestion. Like the others, he followed the Major in silence, none the less, merely slipping his hand under the arm of the girl and walking at her side.

Jacqueline herself was perhaps as little impressed by the unusual move as any one present. Although she was a soldier's daughter, she really knew little of military procedure. The fact of Martout's having asked her to be present at a conference bearing on the course made necessary by the threatening advance of the German forces, did not excite in her mind any particular emotion of surprise. In fact, her most conscious feeling as she entered the room with Fitzmaurice was one of grief that the château was once more in all probability to be abandoned, if only for a time, as Martout had suggested.

The Major waved his companions to chairs and himself remained standing at one end of the table, waiting until all were seated, Jacqueline and Fitzmaurice side by side. He began speaking then without any preamble:

"Gentlemen and mademoiselle: The officers here present know, though perhaps mademoiselle does not, that this château is a point of importance just now in our plans of operation. Also they know that when I was this morning ordered to advance and seize it, I was also told to hold it, and that reenforcements would be sent to enable me to make good my tenure in event of the very thing which now threatens—a return attack by the enemy's forces.

"That those supports have not arrived is in itself patent. I need not explain the position in which we find ourselves as a result. Lieutenant Fitzmaurice's brilliant exploit of the past hour has enabled us to learn of that position, also that our supports are not as yet near enough to come in touch before we will be engaged and in all likelihood driven out with loss. I desire, therefore, to ask your opinion as to the expediency of our action at this time."

He paused and swept the faces of the men ranged about the table. It was an officer of cuirassiers who first made any response.

"Fall back to your supports. When you come in touch, return to a counter attack. That, sir, would be my advice. To remain now would be to throw away men without accomplishing the object desired. A retirement and a later attack might give us permanent possession."

Martout nodded. A faint smile twitched his stern lips briefly.

"Just what, sir, do you mean by a later attack? At night?"

The officer of cuirassiers stiffened.

"I meant later in the sense of future time, sir, but I agree that if possible the night attack would be best—tonight if we can do it. If we retire with little resistance—apparently in a hurry—as though driven completely, we may produce the effect in their minds of something like a complete dispersement. If then we come in contact with our support and return at once—*Pfoul*" He snapped his fingers and lifted a slight black mustache and his eyebrows in a grimace, seemingly meant merely to point his remarks.

"Excellent," said Martout, and turned to Fitzmaurice. "Lieutenant, just about what was the composition of the advance you observed?"

"A troop of uhlans, sir, the hussars who

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were here this morning, several full regiments of foot, and some machine-guns; also two batteries of heavier cannon in the first section. So far as I could see there appeared to be other columns farther back, whether coming here or to be diverted to other parts of their line I, of course, can not say."

Martout nodded again.

"Let us suppose they are coming here. If they are given time to entrench and establish themselves, it will take a heavy bit of work to dislodge them. A quick retirement producing the effect suggested, of a dispersement in fact, thereby establishing in their minds a false security, followed by a quick return, is, in my own judgment, the proper course to follow. We are morally sure that our own supports can not be far back. In fact, their delay is an inexplicable thing to us now. Gentlemen, what do you say?"

"Discretion," said a captain, "is the better part of valor, I have heard."

"This is not a question of valor!" snapped Martout shortly. "It's a question of which method will best serve our country. I like not a retirement any better than the next, and God knows we have had enough of them in the past month. Well, gentlemen—well?"

"Retire and attack tonight," said the cuirassier.

The captain who had just spoken nodded.

"I suppose, sir, we have no other choice. Myself, I had rather stay and fight it out if any hope of success presented. But—if we're surely coming back later——"

"We are. Depend upon it," the cuirassier assured him, twitching eyebrows and mustache fiercely. "*Nom d'un chien!* Do you think we are not? Something's happened that they haven't backed us up, but we'll return—most certainly, *mon ami.*"

Martout's eyes still questioned the others in the room. One by one they either nodded or voiced a reluctant assent.

To Jacqueline, watching, it was evident that each and every one of those grim-faced men-at-arms was yielding to circumstance from a sense of duty rather than any wish or feeling of fear. Her heart swelled as she noted the fact. They were deliberately placing advantage to their army, their nation, ahead of personal chagrin. If they could serve best by falling back and saving their fighting unit, then they must fall back and hope to retrieve the necessity later.

Her heart warmed to them. They were the men of her country. She turned to Fitzmaurice with shining eyes.

"Aren't they splendid?" she whispered. "They don't want to go, but they will do it because it is wisest and gives them a better chance in the future."

He nodded. That strange uneasy feeling was still nagging at him somehow. So far, the senior officer had given no reason, brought forward no point, which could explain the motive for the sparkling girl at his side. Why had Martout said he wished to consult Jacqueline as well as his associates in this matter? Here it was well-nigh decided, and long enough taken in deciding it too, and not one word had been said which could in any way involve her interests, save in so far as retirement would necessitate her leaving the château with her aunt.

The Major had thrown back his shoulders and was speaking again.

"Then I shall order the evacuation for the time. I shall take upon myself the full responsibility for my act. To me was given the order to hold this position. If for what I deem the best end I surrender it without engaging the enemy's forces, on me be, if any, the blame. Once in contact with our reenforcements, we shall return. On that I am determined. Gentlemen, are we agreed?"

They bowed assent, and shoved back their chairs.

It was ended then. Fitzmaurice turned to his companion.

"Go now, and get your aunt ready quickly. I will speak to the Major about it," he directed, and made as if to rise.

Jacqueline's lips took on a pensive droop. Despite her resolve they quivered slightly. Now that it was decided, she found it very, very hard to leave this home of her childhood—to go out from it, knowing that soon it would be given over wholly to the foe of her country, to enter and hold without restraint or hindrance. She nodded without words. She was loathe to attempt speech just at that moment lest it betray her inward feeling.

But even as she laid her hands on the arms of her chair to assist her rising, Martout resumed abruptly:

"One moment more then. We are, it appears, decided that the best we can do is to relinquish our present position and chance an attack in force under cover of darkness.

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There is a point to be considered in regard to that, and one I foresaw before asking you to this consultation."

Again he paused, while all eyes turned upon him.

Fitzmaurice sank back in his seat. Now he felt it was coming—the real meat of the whole situation which had actuated the Major's actions. He put out a hand and covered one of Jacqueline's, where it lay on the arm of her chair. It seemed to him that Martout appeared reluctant to go on, even after he was sure of an undivided attention. The man stood looking down at the table for several moments before he continued in a wholly different tone:

"In the attack of this morning we shelled this château. For that Lieutenant Fitzmaurice gave us excellent service by his work in marking the range. If we return here tonight it will certainly be necessary to cover our final advance with shell and shrapnel. This being the first lunar quarter, there will be but very scant light. So far as our delivery of the attack is concerned, that is in our favor. But because of it, also, it will be difficult to establish an effective artillery practise, even though we succeed in getting our guns far closer than they were this morning. At the same time there is a feature of the château itself which strikes me in regard to this very condition. It is the position of its two towers."

He turned his gaze from the waiting men to Jacqueline now.

"This morning, as I entered here, Mademoiselle Chinault was good enough, loyal enough, to declare that a house was a small thing to give to one's country. I do not wish to appear to belittle this beautiful and historic structure, but if it were possible for her to remain here——"

"Remain here?" Fitzmaurice interrupted sharply, and lifted himself from his chair.

"Lieutenant, you forget yourself," said Martout. "Resume your seat."

"But—" the Englishman flushed and stammered, between shocked resentment of the thing proposed and the habit of discipline born of his service.

Jacqueline caught at his arm and drew him slowly down. She turned to face Martout.

"Yes, Major," she prompted. "If I were to stay here?"

"If you were to stay here," Martout resumed, "and either you or one of your people could get into the west tower, and on the first sound of our guns fired blindly could show some sort of light or beacon from its top, it would—even though exposed for a very few moments only—establish our range and enable us to cover any temporary trenches they may throw up yet this evening with our shrapnel fire directed to right and left of the light.

"I could, of course, leave a volunteer hidden here for the purpose, but he might be discovered and so bring our design to naught, thereby necessitating our attacking as best we could, and so losing many more men than if we could smother their infantry with our own guns. Besides, if he were found, it would put them on their guard. You, on the other hand, mademoiselle, are known as the rightful resident here, and would be far less liable to be suspected of any such plan."

He had been speaking without meeting her eyes beyond a first glance in her direction. Now he threw up his gray-shot head, so like her own father's, and faced her fully. New feeling crept into his tones more and more.

"I do not ask you to do this thing for me, or mine, or any of us here, mademoiselle. I ask you to do it for France. I appreciate all it may mean to you and yours if detected before we can drive home our attack and reach you. I do not wish you to undertake it blindly or at all, unless of your own volition. But this château—your home—is one of the important points necessary to the success of France's plan of defense. Her foe realizes that. It is for that reason he is pressing back to retake and hold it against her. Hold it he must not. With or without your assistance, cost what it will, it must be retaken. But I know your father. I have seen that in you his spirit persists. If as a soldier's daughter and a woman of your nation——"

"Enough!"

Jacqueline sprang to her feet. She drew herself up to the last inch of her height. All droop was gone from face and figure. Her eyes were bright, shot with the light of a great determination. Her delicate nostrils seemed slightly swollen. Beneath the fabric of her gown her breast rose and fell in deep inhalations.

A subtle force seemed to radiate from her being as she stood in the lessening light in

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the old home of her youth, among the soldiers of her country—a something which spoke of fire, and spirit, and unquenchable resolve to serve in the fullest measure the traditions of it and her family and nation.

"I shall stay and attempt this thing, Major Martout," she said clearly and distinctly. "I meant all I said this morning. My home, my life, if need be, belong unreservedly to France! If by offering either I can gain her an advantage, or save the lives of those brave men who are fighting her battles, the suggestion is sufficient—there is no need for a request."

"Jacqueline!"

Fitzmaurice reached out and caught her arm, while the others pressed closer about the table, their eyes on the fair countrywoman who so bravely threw herself into the breach. He spoke over her shoulder to the Major:

"Sir—I can do no less than protest this suggestion. As men we can not ask a delicate girl to assume our duties, or expose her to the terrible dangers and penalties of such a task as you propose. I am surprised that——"

Jacqueline's own voice cut clear and sharply through his words:

"Just how large should this signal be, Major Martout?"

She seemed scarcely to feel the hand on her arm, or sense the protest of the man who held her. For the moment she was as one in the grip of some supreme exaltation, so great, so vast, that it raised her above all mundane considerations to a higher plane of existence. To the men crowding forward it appeared as if her spirit, hearing the call of the higher duty to country, had burst all bounds of routine existence and leaped forth in answer.

It was to that spirit Martout spoke:

"As large as possible, of course. But a lantern or a torch on the roof will serve our purpose. We will be watching for it closely."

"You shall find it," said the woman. "I promise you for France."

"Amen."

Martout pronounced the word softly, strode from his place and seized her hand, raising it to his lips.

"Gentlemen," he said, as he straightened, "salute a brave woman, and a soldier's daughter."

In the gathering dusk of the room they drew themselves to attention. Their hands rose stiffly in formal salute.

"YOU will retire at once. Get your commands into immediate marching order," Martout directed.

Fitzmaurice had been standing during the past few moments like one in a daze. His hand still on the arm of the girl, he remained breathing deeply, his gaze never leaving that inspired face of patriotic devotion until after that silent soldiers' recognition of respect had been given. Now, however, as the men turned away with a faint clatter of side-arms, he broke out again in protest:

"Major, this thing is beyond the question. It can not be. The signal is all right. I admit it *is* important. But—let me do it. I'll volunteer. I'll hide in the tower and light the thing myself. God, man! Do you know what would happen if she were caught —what would happen to—to her?"

"They would search the tower. They did before," said Jacqueline slowly. "I understand the risk—all of it, Major. I—I am not afraid." Her eyes turned toward Fitzmaurice and softened, losing some of their glitter of purpose, taking on a more gentle luster. "You went to destroy the *taube*, Maurice, and I waited. It is my duty which calls me now, even as yours called then—my duty to France."

"Then look here, Major," Fitzmaurice suggested, without replying to Jacqueline directly. "Let me stay here with her. Surely she can find some corner to hide me about this old place until the time arrives. Anyway, let me try it. I——"

Martout frowned slightly.

"You might be discovered, all the same, Lieutenant," he returned. "Boy, don't think I don't understand how you feel. I had to drive myself to make the suggestion. But if you stayed here and were found out, you would actually do her harm and prevent the accomplishment of our purpose. Besides, your work has made you of too much value to us to make us want to risk you except in the necessary course of your service."

A slight smile parted Jacqueline's lips. Immediately after she contracted her brows a trifle. One would have said some sudden thought had struck her while Maurice was speaking, the Major replying. Abruptly she nodded her head as if reaching a

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decision. Once more the fire leaped in her eyes.

"But hang it, man," Fitzmaurice flushed deeply, in almost boyish fashion, "Mademoiselle Chinault and I love each other. Can you understand what this thing means to me now? If you ever loved a woman —really loved her, you——"

"Lieutenant," said the Major. "I have a girl nearly mademoiselle's age in Paris. I loved her mother. Perhaps I understand even better than you just what I have done, in *all* its bearings. It was a hard thing to bring oneself to ask, as I have just said."

"Then——"

Fitzmaurice leaned forward.

Jacqueline interrupted:

"Make him go with you, Major. I ask it. His danger could do me no good. And, believe me, I do not think I shall be in any great danger. It has come to me while we have been speaking just how I shall accomplish my undertaking. The—the way has been shown."

Martout nodded.

"Lieutenant," he directed, "you will go with my command. That, sir, is an order."

"At least," said the lieutenant, pale now about the lips, "let me remain as long as is safe."

"Very well, sir," the major assented. "I rely upon you to follow us then. Mademoiselle, I bid you *au revoir* and salute you as a soldier."

He brought up his hand, and, turning, strode to the door.

"What madness," gritted Fitzmaurice as he vanished. "Jacqueline, for God's sake, for our love's sake, give it up while there is time. You can't stay here and run this risk. I can't let you. I love you. I can't go and leave you behind me, knowing what you intend. Sweetheart, for our love and all it will mean, abandon this desperate undertaking before it is too late."

"Maurice," said the girl, "do you remember this afternoon in the tower, and what we spoke of, and how I said I wanted to be worthy of the name I bear, and of all that those vanished ones did, before they could bequeath me my life and my name and its honor?"

"But if you should be detected. It would mean—oh, terrible things, dear heart. You're young and beautiful, Jacqueline. It —it might mean worse things than death itself."

She paled slightly, shaking her head.

"Not that—death would come first, Maurice. But last night Colonel Fredreich said a woman should hold nothing above the interests of her country. I shall profit by his teaching in so far as staying here to serve mine is concerned."

"And nothing I can say—will change you?"

She shook her head.

"Jacqueline!" He seized her almost roughly and lifted her face with one hand. "Kiss me, sweetheart."

She tore away.

"No! Maurice, don't try to make me weaken. I shall need all my courage—all my wits." She paused a moment and went on more calmly. "I know it is hard for you to go. It was hard for me to stay, when you went against the *taube*. It isn't that I don't know or don't want to go with you, Maurice. Oh, don't think I have changed in any way—in anything. It's just that this thing I must do for my country—for France. And while you were gone this afternoon I told my aunt all that had happened, Maurice, and she wants to see you. Will you go with me to her now before you have to leave?"

Fitzmaurice drew a breath deep into his lungs.

"Yes. I'll go," he said. "Take me to her." His eyes lighted. "Perhaps she will think differently about this mad hazard you are set on taking."

Jacqueline smiled slowly.

"She is a Chinault," she said simply, and put out her hand for his. "Come."

They passed out of the room to the hall and so down to the kitchen, where Jean and Pierre and Marthe were lunching at the table, and on into Marthe's bedroom, where a candle on a stand threw a circle of light across the bed, and the window-shade was drawn.

"It is I, auntie," Jacqueline announced. "Here is Lieutenant Fitzmaurice—come to see you. My auntie, Maurice."

"Bring a chair and sit down beside me, sir," Madame St. Die directed, and waited until Fitzmaurice had complied. "Take up the candle now, and hold it so that it lights your face distinctly."

In some wonder the man complied with the somewhat unusual request. The woman on the bed studied his features intently. At length she spoke:

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"You have a good face. The eyes are not too close, nor yet too far apart. Your nose is good, your jaw strong, and the lobes of your ears not too large for kindness to a woman. Yes—I would venture to say you have good blood. That is as it should be in one who blends it with that of the Chinault. Well, sir, I have heard much about you today. I understand that you love my niece?"

"Love her? I worship her!" Fitzmaurice exclaimed. "That's why all this insane plan drives me to the verge of distraction. How can I go away and leave her? And yet that ass, Martout, orders me to do so at her own request. I could throttle him for making his suggestion in the first place."

"Just what are you talking about, young man, or do you know?" inquired Madame St. Die almost sharply.

"Good Lord! You don't know, of course!" gasped Fitzmaurice.

In a few words he told her.

"And," said the little lady, "I understand you object?"

"Object? Object to her running any such terrible risk? Can you imagine what would happen if she were detected?"

"My imagination rarely disturbs me greatly. And she must not be detected," said Madame St. Die.

"One can't be sure," persisted the lieutenant. "Knowing that, how can I go away and leave her when I love her as I do?"

The invalid smiled slightly.

"I've raised her from three years, and had some considerable opportunity to grow fond of her myself," she rejoined. "Even so, I would not be the one to wish her to refuse the great issue when it faced her, monsieur. It appears to me that this signal is a very necessary detail. That being the case, it must be lighted. And Jacqueline becomes the best agent for its lighting."

"That isn't the point," Fitzmaurice kept on. "I know it should be lighted. But I offered to stay here and let you folks hide me until the proper time, and then light the thing myself. Why couldn't Martout have accepted that offer instead of exposing Jacqueline to danger? He offered excuses, of course, but not one of them sufficient."

"For instance?" questioned the woman on the bed.

"Nothing of weight," Fitzmaurice plainly evaded.

"He said Maurice would be of greater service elsewhere," Jacqueline explained, interrupting now for the first time.

"A very good reason, it appears to me," said her aunt. "Lieutenant, you should go. I am sure Jacqueline and I shall be enough to see about the signal. Leave our duty to us and attend to your own. That is the part of a good soldier. I quite understand your feelings in regard to all this. They make me think you will be good to my girl when it is all finished, and there is time for making love instead of war. But it is war with which at present we are dealing. Go now and return when you can. I really like your face very much."

Fitzmaurice rose, drew closer, and put out his hand.

"You are a wonderful pair of women," he said frankly. "You make me feel rather callow, and all that, though I've always tried to be a man. And—and—oh, well, I'm going—and I'm coming back—yet tonight."

"Do," accepted the little lady, placing her hand in his. "I really think Jacqueline has exhibited good judgment. We shall be anxious for your return."

Fitzmaurice turned away.

"Will you go with me to the door," he asked Jacqueline softly.

She nodded and slipped before him to the kitchen, and on out into the falling twilight. Already the infantry was making its way off to the hills in the west, winding across the fields where they had charged that morning. The cuirassiers, now in saddle, still seemed waiting for something.

Fitzmaurice turned to her.

"Will you kiss me now?"

She lifted her mouth and he kissed her.

"Good-by," he said thickly. "If I loved you before, I love you a hundred times more right now. There really isn't any one like you, any one so brave, so beautiful, so true. Be careful—oh, Jacqueline dear, be careful. Every minute I'm away is going to be torture till I get back and find you unharmed."

For just a moment the girl faltered before that whispered love. All the desperate purpose and its demands fell from her and left her just a woman who loved. She clung to him a bit too tightly. With both hands she reached up and pulled down his face to hers.

"I will be careful. I will, Maurice, I will," she protested a trifle wildly. "And, oh, Maurice—I love you—love you—but I love France, too—you and her—forever and

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always. Now go, dear, while I'm strong enough to let you go— Go!"

The cuirassiers were in motion at last. They were filing past. Fitzmaurice turned from her with bowed head and clenched hands. She stood and watched as he strode down through the grass toward the spot where the great Bleriot waited. By and by it chattered sharply. While she watched, it rose up against the sunset and swung like a great wide-winged bat against the western sky. She watched it until it was a dim speck far away—watched it with all her woman's soul in her eyes, then turned back through the kitchen door.

Her aunt's voice reached her, as she entered. She hurried to her, approached the bed, and dropped on its edge. Her eyes questioned the other.

Madame St. Die nodded.

"I like him. He is really a nice boy," she pronounced. "And he really loves you, my child. It was fear for you and nothing else made him speak as he did. I watched him closely. Now forget the man, my girl, and remember only the nation. What is this plan of yours for showing the signal?"

Something of the fire which had shown in the room above, when she pledged herself to the effort, came back into Jacqueline's face. She leaned slightly forward and began speaking swiftly, though softly, while her aunt listened.

"And then I remembered what you said about the old tunnel leading from this room. That was just at the last. And it seemed to me that the way had been shown for me to do what was needed. Does the tunnel lead to the west tower, auntie, and where does it begin?"

"It begins back of my bed, through a piece of the paneling in the wall," said Madame St. Die. "I thought of the possibility of using it myself after your Maurice told me what was forward. Jacqueline, you have developed into quite a woman. I am proud of you, my dear."

"I can slip through the tunnel without any one knowing, light the signal and get back," Jacqueline smiled faintly. "I think it must have been fate made us bring you down here. No one can question my coming to see my sick aunt, and I told Colonel Fredreich you were ill, so that he knows."

"At the same time it will be as well to prepare everything we can before they occupy the château again, and they must be close," said the elder woman. "Send Pierre in to me, my dear. Then go up and receive your German colonel. You might even offer him more entertainment. Be gracious as you may be. Appear to accept the inevitable without question. Leave all save the lighting to Pierre and me. Now go send him in."

Jacqueline obeyed without question, sending the old man from the kitchen, and making her own way up through the house and out to the steps of the courtyard.

Some ribbons of light still lingered over the western hills. Down there she knew the infantry and the cuirassiers were drawing off. Somewhere out there Fitzmaurice rode on his 'plane. She sighed slightly, drooping her shoulders as she turned toward the north and east.

Over there the light from the west still tipped the hills with a last lingering glow. While she stood, there appeared above them the figure of a man and a horse. They came up in dark outline into the fading light. A little pennon fluttered in the breeze of evening from a long staff held in the rider's hand.

He paused as he reached the tip of the hill, and sat sweeping the country below him. He was an uhlan vidette, thrown out in front of his column. The woman who watched, recognized his coming as something expected. She made no move to withdraw into the house, but remained where she was, passively waiting.

IX

THE uhlan rode down slowly from the top of the hill. Behind him came others spaced out. Like the first, they carried long staffs, with the little pennons whipping out from their tips. They too, rode down, and were followed by more.

They began to pour up and over the hill and drop down again in the now falling night, in what seemed an endless succession of men and horses. Like the waves of a human sea, they lapped above the bank of the valley and ran on down its nearer side to cover it with a hostile flood.

As the light lessened, there came a time when Jacqueline could no longer distinguish aught save a darker shadow, which crept over the hills and down. She could not tell when the uhlans left off and the hussars followed. There was naught save the dark

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mass advancing toward her where she stood and waited its coming.

Now and then a faint glint came from a lance-tip of an uhlan, like the flicker of light from the scale of some prehistoric monster. It came to her in a sort of whimsy, that if she wished to go on with the make-believe she and Fitzmaurice had mentioned that afternoon, she might liken herself to the princess captive in an enchanted castle, with some dreadful creature of fable, some terrible dragon of fiery breath and metal scales, creeping through the darkness against her in horrid folds, which glistened dully as they dragged across the hills.

By and by its approach became an audible something, blended with the pound of hoofs, the clank of accouterments, the creak and groan of wheels, the throb of motors, through the night. They were getting close.

Behind her old Pierre lighted lamps in the hall and withdrew, shuffling down the passage. The light streamed through the open door at her back and across the steps, bathing her figure, throwing it into plain view, when three uhlans lowered their lances and rode in under the gate with sharp, searching glances.

The foremost rode directly toward her and pulled up with a clatter of hoofs. Beside his lance he carried a short carbine, and held a flat German automatic ready in his hand. Under his square-topped helmet he showed a round sunburned face with wide-set eyes. He accosted Jacqueline in broken French.

"Where are the men who held this château today?"

"Gone," she replied in German.

The man seemed relieved at the sound of his native tongue and her answer. He shifted slightly in the saddle.

"Are you speaking truly?" he demanded. "It were best to do so." He waved a hand about the court. "None are hidden in the house or those towers to attempt an ambush?"

Jacqueline shook her head.

"No. If you think so, make a search. But I tell you truly that they all went away. They knew you were too strong. Your people were here before, though not your command. See! If you care to dismount, I will show you what one of them did."

She moved toward the door and pointed.

The uhlan swung down and clanked stiff-legged to her side. She gestured again to the panel where the words chalked that morning had strangely been left undisturbed.

"Your Colonel Fredreich wrote them himself, just before he left here this morning," she explained. "He told me any German would respect them."

The uhlan saluted the words as he might have saluted a person.

"That is true," he declared in a new tone of respect. "So then—there will be no trouble. Them of whom the Herr Colonel writes so, are to fear nothing from any soldier of my people."

He strode back to his horse, mounted and rode back to his companions. They spoke briefly and wheeled out through the gate.

Jacqueline went in slowly through the door, reached the stairs and mounted to her room. Lighting her lamp, she dressed herself quickly for the part she felt she must play, chosing a gown of pure white tissue over an underbody of shell pink. She had decided fully to take her aunt's advice and endeavor to keep the German commander, whoever he might prove to be, as well entertained as she could until the signal of the first French gun. If it were Fredreich himself she would have the advantage of their former meeting to help her, and as Fitzmaurice had reported the hussars with the force he had seen, she felt convinced that the colonel would be with them, especially as he had told her that morning that he would return.

Sounds drifted up to her from time to time as she dressed. They told of the massing of large bodies of men below. A regiment marched by, singing once more their march song, "*Deutschland über Alles*," as they had sung it the night before. Her hands trembled slightly as she fastened the hooks of her gown about her body.

Leaving her room she went down and opened the door of an apartment across the hall from the one where she had entertained Fredreich before. She had brought matches with her, and hastily lighted several ornamental lamps and a large piano-light on a standard, which stood beside a grand piano. Plainly the place was a drawing-room of huge proportions, furnished richly and in excellent taste. Seating herself on a bench before the instrument she dropped her hands on the keys and began to play softly with a well-trained touch.

Now and then she glanced over her

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shoulder as her fingers ran over the keyboard. She seemed waiting for some one, playing a part thought out, as in reality she was. Through the music she evoked, her ears were strained for the sounds of approach. After what seemed to her tensed nerves a long time, they came.

Heavy boot-heels rang on the stone of the outer steps. There was a jingle of spurs, the clash of a scabbard. A harsh voice spoke and was answered.

Her head bent now somewhat forward, she played on, a louder, more martial strain. And to her ears it seemed that only one pair of feet advanced along the hall and paused at the door. She broke off in the midst of a measure and turned around.

In the doorway the cloaked figure of a man was standing. The lamplight striking upon his helmet in little points of refraction glinted and sparkled. The tentative smile she had first seen the morning before again sat on his thin-lipped mouth.

Jacqueline rose from the bench and stood confronting the newcomer.

He removed his helmet, clicked his heels, and bowed from the waist stiffly.

"Do not permit me to interrupt the music," he admonished. "I but came to inform you of my return, mademoiselle. It was, as you may recall, promised."

Jacqueline smiled by intent.

"And it appears that you are a man of your word, *Herr General.* I was aware that your forces had returned, but I was uninformed as to whether you had again ventured back in person."

Fredreich threw back the cloak from his shoulders and leaned against the frame of the door.

"General—ventured," he repeated, his smile growing. "*Himmel!* My incognito is torn into veritable tatters, and my vanity flattered at the same time by your tongue. Myself, however, I am of the opinion that you probably overrate any danger to which I may have been exposed in the first place. As for the present—there is none at all. This time we really *occupy* the château."

Jacqueline waved a hand to a chair.

"That being the case, will you not occupy a chair also?" she suggested.

He nodded, entered and sat down.

"Go on with the music, mademoiselle," he remarked, throwing one booted leg over the other.

"It is so difficult to play standing," she flashed.

Fredreich threw back his head and laughed.

"Then why stand?"

"One does not sit without permission in the presence of a *Feldmeister.*"

The colonel sobered.

"You really know who I am?" he questioned.

Jacqueline bowed.

"As a soldier's daughter I know something of other soldiers, and there are the illustrated papers, *Mein Herr von*——"

"Stop!" said Fredreich. "Perhaps since my identity is so well known, it is as well that I brought a strong force with me, and have more coming. Sit down, mademoiselle, and answer me some questions, made necessary by your own words. I presume the man in command of the troops who attacked here this morning was equally informed of the fact?"

Jacqueline bit her lips in acute vexation. It was not in her scheme to excite the man's suspicions lest she betray things which might prove fatal to her plans and those of Martout. Furthermore, she was not so positive of his identity as she had assumed to him to be. She gathered her wits quickly before she answered:

"What could you expect? Quite naturally he questioned me about you. I described you as best I could."

"He could scarce be sure from a girl's description," Fredreich said.

"But you signed your initial to what you wrote on our door this morning," she countered swiftly. "It was not an 'F'."

Fredreich shrugged.

"So. My kindness betrays me. Another question, however. Where did your troops go when they left?"

"West," said the girl.

The German chuckled.

"So they would. It has become almost a habit—to go west and south with them. But how far? Did you not hear any talk as to the position of their main body?"

"I heard their major say that they had been disappointed in promised reenforcements, and could not hope to make any effective resistance to your force," said Jacqueline with seeming reluctance. Abruptly she went on more quickly: "*Herr Feldmeister,* I am only a girl, and I don't know just what I ought or ought not to say.

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But I hope you will not lead me into any admissions which might damage the cause of my country."

"I hope not," he responded; "because from to-day, mademoiselle, your country is mine. Though at times we may fall back as we did this morning, for the purpose of gaining strength, at the same time the word 'retreat' has been stricken out of our code-book forever. Our army goes forward, always—or dies; but it does not give up what is taken. The way to be strong is to take and retain what is taken. It is such strength which makes nations great, and weaker nations tremble. Then I understand that this inquisitive French major admitted that his support had failed to materialize?"

"Yes." Jacqueline was plaiting and unplaiting a gauze fold of her dress, looking down, her eyes veiled in what might be indecision.

"But he mentioned no destination—no point on which he was falling back?" Fredreich wrinkled his upper lip and mustache.

"He—he spoke of a complete retirement, as being forced upon him," she said shortly, without looking up.

"He used the word 'complete'?"

"Yes. He—he said it was inexplicable to him what had happened."

Fredreich smiled somewhat grimly.

"*We* could perhaps have given him an explanation," he said in comment. "You have heard our guns all day?"

"Yes."

"That was the major's explanation, had he sensed it. There was fighting elsewhere," Fredreich summed up. "His reenforcements were probably diverted to some other point, where their presence was made more important by us."

In a flash of daring she lifted her eyes and met those of the complacent man in the chair.

"Then—then you do not think they will —come back?" she asked in broken fashion.

Fredreich shifted his position slightly.

"My dear young lady," he replied in patronizing tones, "you make me either speak an untruth or destroy hope altogether. Perhaps it were better to end the suspense at once. I look for their return—never. I suppose just at the moment the idea rather appals, but time will remedy that—that and quiet submission to the stronger power, which in time brings peace."

She made no answer for at least a minute, but sat on, folding and unfolding the cloth in her fingers.

"So my aunt said," she returned at length. "She said I must accept things without question. Still — I hoped — I couldn't quite feel that—that——"

"Your aunt is a wise woman!" Fredreich declared. "I trust she suffered no injury to her condition as a result of the trouble this morning? We will appreciate women like her after we have won peace."

"No." Jacqueline shook her head. "We moved her down to a room below this floor, and she has remained there all day. When I told her your men were returning, she sent me up to receive you, and offer you any entertainment we could provide."

"Dinner—and your presence once more?" Fredreich bowed.

"If you wish it."

"Quarters for my staff and myself while we remain? Last night they made shift, but now——"

"Certainly, General. Had you mentioned it last night——"

"Delightful! I must pay my compliments to your aunt in person tomorrow," said the German. "And I left my staff roosting like fowls on the steps without. If they might come here while we wait the summons to dinner?"

"Of course. Shall I call them?" Jacqueline rose.

"No. I'll do that myself." Fredreich rose also.

"Then I shall go see about the dinner," Jacqueline suggested.

"And after dinner you will play for us? You have a good touch."

"I will try, if you wish it. I fear I shall be nervous, however."

Fredreich gave her a glance. She fancied he frowned for not more than an instant. Yet it was as if in that space he asked himself a question concerning this woman with whom he conversed.

"Not you," he said shortly, and drew back to allow her to pass through the door. "By the way, where are my hostages, mademoiselle?"

"Waiting in the kitchen," she informed him promptly. "Will you want them at once?"

Fredreich grinned. "No," he decided, and added: "There is small use in our antagonizing one another any longer, mademoiselle. Let there be a truce between us

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while I am here. Treat me as a guest. I and mine will treat you as our hostess. I have small desire to bring any major sorrow or trouble on you or yours."

Jacqueline inclined her head in assent as she once more turned away. She was undecided in her own mind just how to consider the first reencounter in net results. There could be small doubt that the man was suspicious. Had her compliance been too ready? Was that why he had given her that frowning glance of appraisement? Had she added to his suspicions? Yet his last words, his refusal to place Jean and Pierre again under restraint could indicate only a desire upon his part to make her position easy, as he had said.

As she made her way below-stairs, she allowed herself to hope that her seeming reluctance in answering his questions had, as she intended at the time, encouraged him to belief in all she had said, and so added to that impression of reluctant but complete surrender of the château, which Martout had desired. If so, then full play would be given to the overweaning confidence of the man in the security of his own tenure, and the likelihood of the planned attack reduced to a minimum in his mind.

She went down and sent Marthe and Pierre scurrying about in preparation for the promised dinner, which must be served within the shortest possible time. Then she went on to the room behind the kitchen and softly closed the door before narrating what had occurred to Madame St. Die.

"Everything is ready here," that lady declared. "Pierre has placed all which will be needed inside the passage. Also he has gone through to the far end and loosened the trap door in the floor of the tower, lest in the end it should have defied your strength, after remaining closed for years. In fact, I had him do that even before anything else, as it was most essential. He had barely time to slip the other things into the tunnel before these people arrived.

"I have had my bed drawn down slightly, as you can see, that you may slip behind it to open the panel. So far you have done well. Maintain now the impression. Continue to appear submissive, and allow the native vanity of the man to nourish his own conceit to the end. When that end comes, be careful. Your manner should show consternation if what you expect occurs in his presence. Go now. Let yourself be seen. You should not remain out of sight over long." She smiled with thin lips. "It should go hard if two women can not outwit one general—for the sake of their country. Go, Jacqueline. Leave the dinner directions to me. Go up and arrange the table."

Jacqueline bent to kiss her before she left the room.

"I shall try to play my part as I should," she said simply. "So much depends upon it, that I must—and yet—that very thing makes me a little afraid."

"So long as the man doesn't know the cause, the attitude of a little fear will not displease his sort," observed her aunt. "It is something to which he has been accustomed. Run along now and amuse him. He will then think less about other things. Leave the door open that I may talk to Marthe."

A SOUND of singing reached Jacqueline's ears as she mounted to the floor above. A burst of men's voices and the sound of the piano came from drawing-room door.

She walked boldly down the hall and paused to look inside. Fredreich had removed his cloak, which lay across a chair, and had seated himself on the bench in front of the keyboard. His staff stood clustered about him, while he played with a firm assurance. As she reached the door, he crashed out several sonorous chords, and the voices again took up the song.

"Strong and true is the watch on the Rhine!" came the words to her ears, well sung by voices of cultured control, and in perfect key. In the middle of the verse, however, Fredreich broke off and swung himself about to face her.

"Ah, mademoiselle!" he exclaimed. "Music hath charms to soothe the hungry beast. Is dinner ready?"

Jacqueline smiled appreciation of his paraphrase and shook her head slightly.

"Not yet, Herr Colonel. I but came up to arrange the table, and so heard the singing."

"Then," said Fredreich, "I suppose I must play some more. Gentlemen—again."

He turned and struck the keys sharply.

"Strong and true is the watch on the Rhine," they sang, as the girl drew back across the hall to prepare the great table in the opposite room for their meal. It followed her even after she had shut the

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dining-room door against it. "Strong and true."

She drew a deep breath. She, too, was keeping a watch—a lone woman in the midst of these strong men, who assailed her home and nation. It must be a true watch, strong in spirit, if not in physical strength—strong in purpose, no matter what might come—so strong that no subtlety of words or manner or action could betray it and drag it out or make it known—so true that it would not waver or shrink until that light blazed from the tower to give her nation the range.

She lifted her arms and stretched them out toward the west. Her eyes widened and darkened. A few hours, at most, would compass the time of her watch—and then she would show the signal. And the great idea which had come to her when she stood with Maurice and the Major again caught her up and swept her to the heights of supreme resolve. All doubt of self fell from her for the moment, and left her thrilling with naught save her patriotic devotion and the things she was to do. As large a signal as possible, the Major had said. It should be large, unmistakable, glowing—as glowing as the inspired fire which had waked its conception in her soul.

The music from across the hall changed its tempo and swung into a newer measure. Faint and muffled, sung in deep voices, it came to her, bringing as on the night before its heavy menace.

"*Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles,*" they roared in full-throated acclaim, rolling the words out in strong Teutonic accents, voicing the thing for which they had labored and planned, and were now seeking to compass with the most perfect engine of conflict the world had ever seen, of which that dark, sinuous monster of armed force which had crept down across the hills in the gathering night had been but one infinitesimal feeler—a tentacle of the central brain, thrown out to grip and hold and strangle all resistance.

In a sudden passion of resentment the girl clenched her hands.

"No!" she whispered harshly. "No! Might may conquer for a time, but in the end, Right must triumph. In the end heart and soul and faith must gain against deliberate planning. Somewhere—oh, somewhere the plan must break and throw out the whole fabric of their planning. It's—it's too dreadful, this mathematical precision—this awful certainty of result. It's inhuman. They seem to even deny any human equation. They aren't an army of human beings, they are just—just a war-making machine. Somewhere the machine must break, and, once broken, the whole engine——"

She checked her utterance abruptly. She realized that she must not give way to this seething emotion if she were to maintain her poise and do her share toward that hoped-for breaking. She turned to arrange the table.

All that she possessed which was fine, fitted to grace the board of a banquet, she dragged out and used to deck the board where her enemies would sit. She spared nothing, as she worked to the final result of producing a table which would charm the senses by its completeness and richness of appointment. Shutting her ears to the voices from beyond the closed door, she persevered until all was finished, then set the door wide and went down to the kitchen to see how nearly the meal itself might be ready.

She found Marthe in reality waiting for her summons, and directed her to begin serving with Pierre's help, at once. She drew a deep breath as she again climbed the stairs. The hardest part of her task lay still before her—the waiting, the keeping up of a pose, while all the time her soul would be listening for that signal shot out of the night.

What would come after that would be swift, desperate action, with little time for any introspective consideration. But the interval—that was the thing to try her powers of control. She leaned for a moment against the door at the top of the stairs, bowing her head against it to gain a final courage for what was to come.

"God," she breathed in well-nigh inaudible accents, "help me. Make my watch strong and true."

She pushed the door open. They had stopped singing. Outwardly calm, but inwardly seething with her emotions, she approached the drawing-room door and paused on the threshold.

"*Herr* Colonel," she announced, "such refreshment as I could prepare on short notice awaits your pleasure."

Fredreich rose.

"Gentlemen, attend." He advanced

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toward her as she drew back, reached her side and offered his arm. "One may escort one's hostess," he said smiling, as he led her to a chair and took the place beside it.

As on the night before he filled her glass and his own.

"Gentlemen," he cried again. "I give you his Majesty, William II."

"*Hoch!*" they replied in chorus, lifting their glasses. "*Hoch der Kaiser, hoch!*"

They drank.

Jacqueline lifted her glass and turned to the man beside her.

"You make for your hostess a difficult position," she said. Her glass fell to the floor.

Frederich flushed darkly.

"I am rebuked," he returned as he drew out her chair and went on in louder accents: "And once more, *Herren*, I give you our hostess, fit in beauty to grace any presence, as now by her presence she graces our meal."

Turning to her directly he lifted his glass and drank. Jacqueline smiled rather wanly.

"You make me feel almost as though you intend using me to grace your triumph," she said as she sank to her seat.

"The history which would then record your features would bid fair thereby to excuse the offense, and the very human weakness which inspired it," he made answer. "But these are not the days of Cæsar. We no longer lead our captives in chains through streets lined with banners and paved with roses."

Mademoiselle Chinault's eyes snapped.

"Rather you haul them in stock cars bedded with straw, I understand."

Fredreich shrugged.

"*Gott!* Your tongue still holds its sting! Necessity, mademoiselle. The supply of bed-wagons is limited even on the better railways."

"And," she countered, "I am surprised to hear you speak of human weakness, after our conversation of last night."

"I was speaking," said Fredreich, "of the personal equation. In the fighting machine, we have eliminated the human element mainly—as also the hu*mane*. The great man at the head of our general staff—our 'Big Chief,' as we call him, has long ago ruled upon that point. Our military units have been organized and placed with the same precision that a finished player of chess handles his pieces. Every move necessary in any possible contingency has been considered and decided upon for years. No man on our staff could win to such a position until he had proven himself able at solving such problems.

"Any possible war which could come upon us has been fought and won in the Königsplatz office long ago, and each and every move, each and every disposition of forces, each and every need and requirement, predetermined and provided against. It is that which gives us our celerity of action, our surety of result. War having been thrust upon us, we accept the challenge, and begin merely the putting into effect of those movements which we have already assured ourselves will and must result in the final triumph. It is so that we have eliminated the human element in an almost complete degree.

"And in order to use the machine, composed of men, in the most effective manner, we must use them wherever their unit will do the best work, regardless of cost or loss of life, or any other consideration save the producing of the already planned effect, just as the chess-player again sacrifices a pawn or a piece without compunction, if thereby he can gain an advantage. Yet to use men so, one must abandon all humane considerations and standards. And so far as the enemy is regarded, humanity in the concrete sense has no place in war.

"Our own Big Chief has laid down the rule that the end of an army should be the total destruction of the enemy. Therefore, the harder the thrust we deliver, the greater the loss we inflict, the sooner will the prearranged and inevitable victory be produced. And yet no army ever took the field in a more prepared state than ours. Every essential detail has been foreseen and received full attention; not for the good of the soldier, but for the good of the nation and his ability to serve.

"For instance, where your soldier has six buttons on his trousers, ours has twelve. Why? For two reasons. First, as the position of the suspenders grows irksome, he can shift buttons and the angle of strain. Second, if in battle any should be lost, he still has a reserve. We have gone so far as that. And always our kitchens provide hot coffee for our men on the march, because its heat and contained caffein stimulate and relieve muscular tire, enabling our men to march farther and arrive fresher at that point where their weight is needed."

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It was appalling. As he ran on and on, citing innumerable details of the way in which his nation made war, on a scientific basis, Jacqueline lapsed into the rôle of listener merely. She was glad she need not speak. The cold, impersonal presentation of fact, seemed forcing her slowly down into a spiritual depression.

Some of the complete confidence of the man struck against her hope, battering upon it as his words struck upon her brain. There was something compelling, even to her, in this orderly marshaling of already proven facts—something full of deadly threat, which chilled her with a vague premonition, amounting almost to terror, lest the thing he alleged were about to happen.

A clock on the mantel above the great fireplace struck eleven. It seemed to her that her heart paused and waited between the slow strokes for the sound of that gun which would cry to her the appeal of her nation, hard pressed already by the vast machine which had been built up for her country's undoing. Yet the last stroke died, and she sat on, listening, listening to the man at her side, listening in vain for the gun.

Other guns growled as they had all day and all the day before—the guns of the mighty system of which Fredreich spoke. They made a fitting accompaniment for his words. A sort of sick despair began to lay hold upon her, a feeling as of being caught and held by some invincible, unescapable force, which would presently crush utterly down upon her, and pass on unmindful as to whether she lived or died, blindly insensate to anything save its final purpose of meeting and overcoming all which stood in its way.

"It comes down to preparedness in the end," Fredreich was summing up. "Take the incidents here alone, of the last two days, for example. Your people should have held this château in falling back, rather than have gone beyond it. Would our strategy have overlooked that? No. Months before we would have planned to hold it, and it would have been held. Yesterday we took it without resistance. Today your people wasted men in driving us out. The fact that they wanted it proved it of importance. We retired for the time, and came back with force to hold it. And we found them unsupported throughout an entire day. That was a second blunder, which we would never have made.

"The net result, then, is what? We have developed an evidence of weakness on their part to themselves, wrested from them what they now know they should have held, and established against them the moral effect of even this minor reverse. In the end the total weight of such moral effects is extremely depressing on an army. Its result is far more serious, indeed, than the loss of many men.

"Soldiers expect to lose their comrades, but not battles. If they lose men, they fight the better to inflict an equal or greater loss on the enemy. If they lose battles, they fight less well, because they are discouraged, and come to doubt their generals and themselves. That is another reason why we always win, at no matter what cost, mademoiselle. The army which is not beaten, is the army which, no matter what its loss in killed and wounded, will win in the end, which always arrives where the master mind of the Big Chief directs it to be at a certain time as surely as though it were a chess piece held in his hand."

Jacqueline put out a hand and raised her wine to her lips. A nervous tremor shook her. She felt that unless she did something her teeth would begin to chatter in another moment. She was cold, chilled through and through with an inward cold. This strain of waiting was becoming more than she could endure.

"Why—why?" she questioned. "*Was* this man right? Had her countrymen failed again? Why was the signal for which she waited, hoped, prayed—to which she was prepared to sacrifice her all, if need be—to answer which she had dared so much—not given?"

She set the glass to her lips, fully aware that Fredreich's eyes were upon her. She would sip a little of the wine, and then—then she must make some sort of answer.

She put down her glass slowly and turned to face her companion. After all, there was but one thing to do—go on playing her part, fostering this confidence of his.

"It's—it's rather dreadful all the same, to hear you talk about it," she said slowly. "You—you see I belong to the other side, *Herr* General."

Fredreich nodded.

"Pardon," he returned, seemingly arrested by her pallor which had grown during his words. "My own enthusiasm has carried me beyond considerate limits, I

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fear. You appear fatigued, mademoiselle, and it is late. We will forego the music this evening. If you will arrange for the quartering of myself and my men——"

"Your room of last night was satisfactory?" she asked.

"Perfectly, yes."

"Take it for tonight, then. You can use any or all of the rooms on that floor or this," Jacqueline told him. "Myself, I shall spend the night with my aunt, below. I shall instruct the woman who showed you your quarters last night to see that all is prepared. Ask her for what you wish. She will obey."

"Excellent," Fredreich accepted. "Perhaps now you will wish to retire?"

She bowed. Her heart was suddenly leaping. At least his consideration, though late, was making her exit easy. If now the signal should sound she could answer at once. The fancy came to her that the very element of human equation which the man denied was now playing into her hands.

Fredreich rose and drew out her chair. She gained her feet.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "our hostess is leaving."

They rose and bowed in silence. On his commander's sign, his aide, Munster, left his place and opened the door. Controlling herself, Jacqueline bowed to Fredreich and the others.

And then—then she was out in the hall, making her way to the door and down the stairs, to speak briefly to Marthe, and go on into her aunt's room and sink on the side of the bed, her hands locked between her knees, her body bent from the hips, her eyes hot and tired, staring straight before her, unmindful of any external object, her ears straining for the sharp call to duty, which did not come.

Her aunt neither spoke nor moved. She lay silent, watching her niece and waiting.

After a bit Jacqueline turned her head.

"They—they haven't fired it—the gun," she said in a voice akin to despair.

X

"PATIENCE," said the woman on the bed. "I have been thinking. Are they fools to come up while the whole place hums like a hive? You have been busy with your part, my child, while I have had nothing to do. Jean Giroux has been eyes and ears for me. He has crept out and come back and told me what was forward.

"This time they are expecting to *hold* the château. Their infantry is digging trenches by lantern, and in the court they have put up trestles for their men to stand on and shoot over the walls. They have brought up many guns and placed them to good advantage. Their cavalry lies on both flanks, in support of the rest.

"Would your Martout be apt to attempt a surprise on a position awake, alive, preparing to receive him? Your father has told me better than that. Armies are not surprised before midnight so well as between then and dawn, when they are mostly asleep, at their lowest physical ebb, exhausted by their efforts of the day before. Wait, then."

Some of the strained tension went out of the girl's face.

"I am foolish," she murmured. "I have been waiting—growing more and more hopeless all the time, without thinking far enough to realize the reason." She smiled slightly. "I—I am very young, auntie, am I not?" She rose. "Tell me how to open the panel, that I may make no mistake when the time does come then."

Madame St. Die nodded.

"Step behind my bed."

Jacqueline slipped in between the wall and the high head of the old-fashioned four-poster in which her aunt was lying.

"Now," said the voice from behind her as she stood, "count ten of the wainscoting-strips from the side wall. Have you done that?"

"Yes." There was a quiver of excitement in Jacqueline's tones. To whom does not the hidden way appeal in subtle fashion?

"Look down now," her aunt went on. "Count to the third board in the floor beyond the tenth strip. Press down upon it with your foot next the wall. Hook your fingers into the crack between the strip and the next, and pull it toward the side."

Jacqueline obeyed. Very slowly a narrow rectangle grew before her. Breathing more quickly she increased her hold on the edge of the strip as the narrow crack opened. The panel slid quite into the side wall and showed her the black throat of the passage. A faint musty odor rushed out to meet her

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—the odor of long-imprisoned air shut away from the sunlight.

"Have you done it?" questioned Madame St. Die.

Jacqueline came back from the spell the mystery of this old, old tunnel had thrown about her.

"Yes," she responded.

"Then leave it open and come back and wait."

Jacqueline emerged from back of the bed and crossed to close the door into the kitchen. In her first hurried entrance she had left it open and forgotten it since. Her aunt stayed her.

"Leave the door as it is," she directed. "Some time ago a man was here and commanded that it should not be closed, and also that lights be kept both in here and in the kitchen."

"But——"

Jacqueline's lips contracted. She turned slowly to face the speaker. Madame St. Die smiled slightly.

"My bed is fortunately placed. Also it is as well I had Marthe draw the shade, early this evening. He did not require that it be raised. Sit down, child. You gain nothing by tiring yourself out by needless pacing."

Jacqueline dropped into a chair. She knit her brows and sat staring at the flicker of the candle. So their espionage extended even to this! Oh, they were thorough! Not even the door of sickness might be closed against them. She shivered quite unexpectedly to herself and sat on.

Midnight struck from a clock in the kitchen and brought with it a soft pad of feet. Jean Giroux slid in and paused by the foot of the bed. His face was thin, shrewd, intense, lighted with the big things of childhood. Very gravely he gave the military salute.

"Things grow quiet, madame," he made report stiffly. "The Germans are rolling themselves in their blankets at last. Save only a few, they seek sleep."

He dropped his hand and turned to the girl.

"I have been the Boy Scout for madame," he explained. "I have gone about. Me, I am but a boy who was yesterday shut up. They do not mind me. Just now one of them said it was time little boys should be tucked up in bed asleep—and he grinned at me, when he said it." He leaned over the foot of the bed on his chest, to raise and kick his bare feet. "Little boy!" he sniffed. "I am a scout."

"Then," said the invalid quickly, "go once more and see if any one is near the door to the kitchen."

He went and returned, shaking his head, his face expectant.

"As I told you, I have been thinking while you were up-stairs," Madame St. Die went on, addressing her niece. "Pierre, at the first mention of what you proposed, set the cans inside the passage by my order. It were better, however, that when the time comes they were at the other end, rather than this. You can save minutes if you have less far to take them, as they are heavy. Suppose now that you light another candle and carry them through to the other end, my child."

Jacqueline roused, picked up one of the several candles lying on the table where the lighted one was burning and ignited its wick. Madame St. Die produced a holder from beneath her pillow. The girl could not but admire how fully her father's sister had thought out and provided for each step which must be taken in what they meant to do.

Taking the candle in her hand, she once more slipped in between the bed and the wall.

"Go with her," her aunt directed Jean Giroux.

The boy pressed at Jacqueline's heels, his face shining at the new adventure. Together they bent and passed through the panel and straightened beyond it, to find the cans of oil Pierre had placed there, sitting almost at their feet.

Giving Jean one, Jacqueline lifted the other. They went forward down the passage. The cans were heavy. Jacqueline was glad the boy was with her to divide the burden, and doubly glad her aunt had thought of thus halving the effort of the final moment. To have carried both cans and the candle, she now saw would have been well-nigh beyond her powers, and to have threaded the passage, of which she had never even heard before that morning, without a light of some sort, would have meant almost fatal delay.

The little woman with her quick brain, was fit sister for a soldier, thought the girl as she plodded forward in the uncertain light of her candle which flickered and

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flared as she went. In a way this journey was in its minor degree equivalent to that preparedness of which Fredreich had spoken.

The hardness and cold of uneven stone flagging struck through the thin soles of her shoes to her feet. A curiosity to behold this unknown part of her people's house for generations laid hold upon her.

When her arm grew tired from the weight of the can, she set it down and lifted the candle higher above her head. Its faint illumination struck up to an arched roof, and out to side walls of roughly hewn stone, now covered with the dust of years and the webs of dark-loving spiders, and streaked here and there with moisture, splotched with mold.

When it had been built, she did not know, but it came to her that its age must date from that of the now inhabited part of the château, constructed long after the old towers and keep, in a more easy and less warlike past, yet at a time when it were well to have an easy means of reaching the real fortress of the place without undue exposure.

It was a new thing added to the interest of her home. If she were quiet, and should sit down here, what vague pictures of the past could her soul gather from its black-shrouded length? Had it rung to the sound of armored feet, swarmed with the strength of the defenders of the towers, rushing hastily to stations? Once she knew, from her aunt's own words, it had harbored and sheltered a company of women, drawn together by the grim terrors of a former war against the same foe which now once more possessed it.

What an odd thing history was—the history of persons and things! The days went by and brought this and that, and all the time each was leading up to some major event, although none suspected the fact in the petty interests of each day itself. Yet that was why she stood here with the can of oil at her feet and the candle in her hand, and Jean sitting upon his can a few feet away.

Since the day before, everything had led up to this moment, as this was leading to the great moment when she should light the promised signal to the guns of France—should fire a beacon to show the path of attack, which should once more make Château Chinault a point held by her nation.

There was Fitzmaurice coming—even in the darkness she flushed now at the thought—there were the words spoken by him, not recognized in their true bearing at the moment, yet which had planted the idea for her plan in her mind. There was Martout's appeal to her for France, and her conception of how to answer, based on her aunt's newly announced existence of the tunnel. There was even her aunt's presence in the very room from which the tunnel opened, her very bed acting as the screen against hostile eyes. Each and every event had but really led up to and prepared for the making of another item in the history of her house, her nation, her own life.

She lowered the candle and stooped to again take up the can of oil. Jean rose and followed as she once more went down the dark bore beneath the courtyard, where the feet of the enemy trod overhead.

After a considerable distance, as it seemed, walking in that half illumination, they came to the foot of a flight of stone steps, leading up to what appeared a square block of stone. Jacqueline mounted part way to examine it closely. Studying its position, she became aware that it was really no more than one of the flags in the floor of the tower. She could see where Pierre, in loosening it hours before, had broken down scales from the grime of years since it had last been raised.

Returning to the bottom of the steps, she took Jean's can and placed it with her own beside the lower tread of the stairs. When the great moment came for her service, she could seize upon them there and carry them up without delay.

She was turning to retrace her steps when Jean himself plucked at her sleeve and brought her to a pause.

He was looking up into her face, as she lowered hers at his touch. His hand still lay on the arm whose hand held the candle. It was thin and soiled. His face, tilted back, was that of a child, but glowing, with partly open lips.

"Mademoiselle," he stammered in the haste of his daring, "when you come back, let me come again with you. I am strong. I carried my can all the way, as you saw. I can carry it up in the tower. Madame has told me what you intend. She has spoken of great things to me this evening—of what it is to serve one's country, and what sort of men are the best for a nation, and of how great a country our country has

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been, and how great she may yet become if everybody works to that end. Mademoiselle, let me come with you when the gun is fired. I, too, would serve my country, if only by carrying a can up some stairs."

Eagerness thrilled in his words—the eagerness of the great adventure, and something more—the budding of that flower of patriotism which makes the doing of service the true man's greatest honor, ennobles the humblest task so it be done for the good of the land he loves, exalts the dull clay left after the shock of battle to be in that brief instant the shape of a hero, unsuspected until the supreme call was heard.

It reached the heart of the girl, waking a kindred of feeling between herself and the child. Yet there was danger. If they should be detected in this attempt it would mean death for the boy, worse for herself perhaps. And yet, was it after all but another step in the leading up to the final act? The cans were heavy. Was this help vouched her in her endeavor by some force stronger than herself—the thing men called fate?

"There is danger in the undertaking, Jean," she said gently.

He dropped his hand from her arm, but his eyes still held on her face.

"My father fights for France," he returned with a little note of hurt pride in his voice. "Is my father afraid?"

"He is a man," Jacqueline responded. "Thou art a child."

"He is *my* father," said Jean. "I am a Giroux."

Something like a sob rose up in Jacqueline's throat. She bent and caught the hand of the boy in hers.

"Yes, that you are, *mon Jean*," she made both resolve and answer. "Thou shalt come with me then if you wish it. Now let us return to madame."

They went back through the tunnel—still waiting to serve its purpose, too, after so many silent years, even as they now waited to serve—back to where thefaint glow of the candle beside Madame St. Die's bed made a pale streak out of the panel in the wall, so that Jacqueline blew out her own light and went on, still holding the soiled hand of the boy.

Her aunt's eyes questioned as she came out into view. She nodded.

"All is ready," she said.

"No one approached," said madame. "It remains then but to wait. Sit you down, child. Waiting is women's work. How many are waiting tonight, do you suppose? Waiting and watching, hoping and praying, in a thousand, thousand homes, east and west, north and south—just women—just waiting—for what? For the news which shall make their hearts beat again for a while, or crush hope quite out. Men paint great pictures of other men locked in the grapple of death, and call them portrayals of war. They ought to paint just the picture of a woman with the torture of hell in her eyes. Then—then they would have what they sought—the real cruelty of war, the real tragedy of it behind it. Sit you down and wait then—play the woman's part."

"Don't," said the girl thickly. "Oh, don't! Maurice is out there somewhere." She flung her hand toward the west. "I've been trying—not to think!"

"*Dieu!*" cried Madame St. Die. "I am an old fool. *Ma petite*, forgive my loose old tongue. I had forgotten for the moment. Fear not, dear girl, he is safe, at least for tonight."

Jacqueline shook her head.

"How safe? Did he not say he would come back?"

"So he did—so he did," her aunt grudged assent. "He would, of course, with you here. It is so hard to wait when one is young. I remember that, too, now."

JACQUELINE sat down on a chair drawn close to the stand with its candle. She laid her hands limply in her lap. Her breast heaved in a long-drawn, quivering sigh. Her eyes turned as by instinct toward the west. But she made no answer.

Jean squatted on another chair, wide-eyed, shifting now and then with the restlessness of childhood. The night had at length grown quiet. Even the far guns grumbled but seldom, like dogs which growl in their sleep and fall silent again.

One o'clock struck. Marthe came down the stairs from above. She brought a blanket and pillow with her and said briefly that they had sent her below, keeping Pierre to open wine, of which they were drinking a great deal; smoking and singing their songs, and they had broken some glasses. She wrapped the blanket about her, laid the pillow on the floor close by the kitchen stove

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and stretched herself out, to fall into a heavy sleep in which now and then she breathed harshly, gurgling in her throat and seeming about to choke.

Jacqueline sat on. Jean had begun to nod on his chair. After a time he slid off and curled himself up in a corner with his head on an arm, very much, as it seemed to the girl keeping vigil, like a tired little puppy. Her aunt did not speak.

Now and then Jacqueline fancied she, too, dozed, for from time to time she started and stared at her niece with eyes which shone bright in the light of the candle, from between her lids, and turned a bit and lay quiet again.

At half-past one, Pierre crept down the stairs. Some of the men still drank and others had gone into rooms and to bed. Fredreich was among the latter. The others had told him he might get some sleep if he wished.

Name of a pipe, but those men could drink! Mumbling and mouthing, he drew a chair up to the kitchen table, seated himself, folded his arms as a rest and laid his head upon them. After a time he, too, seemed to fall into sodden slumber.

Jacqueline began to count the slow drag of the minutes. What was occurring outside beneath the veil of darkness? Had Martout come up with his laggard supports? Were they coming back, creeping up, creeping up into position for the swift attack, while she sat here beside the guttering candle, waiting to keep her pledge? Or had they already arrived at the point desired? Were they lying down there somewhere, waiting like herself for the hour to strike before they essayed the venture? And if so, why did they wait longer? Surely all vigilance was as fully relaxed now as it would be. And was Fitzmaurice with them? Was he lying out there somewhere in the night, thinking of her as she was thinking of him—impatient of the delay which kept them one from another?

She shifted her position. The chill of the September night between midnight and dawn had crept into the room through the open doors.

Her aunt moved.

"What?" she murmured, half roused from slumber. "What did you say?"

"Nothing," said the girl. "Go back to sleep, auntie."

"I was not sleeping," denied her elder with mild indignation, and belied herself the moment after by falling back into her doze.

Somewhere a cricket began shrilling through the night, its strident voice filling the room, to the girl's strained ears. By and by, it seemed to her that she fitted words to its piping: "Strong and true—strong and true." They were the words of the song Fredreich and his men had sung. "Strong and true is the watch on the Rhine."

She too was keeping a vigil. She had prayed out there on the stairs that it might be strong and true — her watch on the Marne. But it was a long, long vigil. She felt tired, utterly weary, and the chill of the night was creeping into her body and limbs.

Where was Fitzmaurice? How strong and brave and clever he was! How daringly he had overcome the *taube!* Her heart filled with pride as she recalled the struggle. And what a boy he was with it all; what a big boy, what a dear boy! Up there in the tower— Ah, the tower! She could see him yet, brandishing the broken spindle of the chair. And then—then he was on his knee before her, and a boy no longer, but a man—the man—dragging her soul up to confession by his appeal. Where was he now? The Bleriot had looked like a great bat against the sunset.

One—two! The clock struck with a whirring jar in the kitchen.

CRASH!

Sharp, clear, reverberant, the sound of a single field-gun rent the darkness with its imperative demand. It struck upon the ears of the watcher, seeming to fill all the vast reaches of her world and blot out all—everything else.

Jacqueline sprang to her feet. In the kitchen, Marthe started up screaming. Little Jean uncoiled from his puppylike huddle and scrambled to his feet. On the bed, the dozing woman opened her eyes and half raised herself on an arm. Her eyes fell on Jacqueline already thrusting the wick of her candle into the flame of the other.

"Go!" she cried, lifting an arm and pointing. "Light the path of France!"

Light the path of France! The great moment at last! The wick caught. It flamed. Her breath coming in short, catching inhalations, her bosom panting, her eyes alight

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with the fire of her purpose, Jacqueline lifted her candle and turned to reach the panel back of the bed.

With Jean behind her, wide-eyed, trailing, she slipped through it and rose, running down the stone-paved floor, stumbling over its uneven surface in her haste, catching herself and her breath in little gasps and running on, on, down the never-ending reaches toward the steps and the cans.

To light the path of France! Her mind was full of the thought of service. France, her homeland, was calling through the night —calling for a light to point her way. The long vigil was ended with its waiting, its hope deferred. Now must follow swift action to prove that the watch she had kept had been strong and true to the end.

Behind her she heard Jean breathing shortly, the patter of his bare feet over the stones. Brave little ally who had volunteered to help her!

Was the tunnel never ending? Surely she had not come so far when she carried the cans here before. Was there some side passage, and had she made a wrong turning? The thought chilled.

Then—then—no! The flickering, whipping flame of her candle showed faintly the steps and the cans beside them. She seized one and began to stagger upward with it toward the great flag in the floor of the tower, which blocked her further way.

When it was just over her head, she put down her candle.

"Jean," she called softly.

"Here, mademoiselle," he answered from the step below.

"I shall put out the candle and raise the stone," she gasped shortly, and blew out the flame.

Darkness, thick, impenetrable fell, upon them. Jacqueline raised her arms and pushed on the stone square. It yielded slightly. She forced herself upon a higher step and pushed until her young back bent under the lifting effort.

The stone rose slowly, up and up, until she could straighten, holding it tilted on edge above her. Still forcing it back, she rose another step, while she raged at its stubborn bulk. Without warning it slipped quite from her grasp and fell over with a dull, crunching crash which brought her heart into her throat in quick apprehension.

A shrill metallic clangor was filling the night—a bugle waking the sleeping men in the trenches and the courtyard. So brief had been that interminable time then in the tunnel.

Jacqueline caught her breath deep and full into her lungs. Its shrill voice had drowned the sound of the stone's fall to sleep-dulled ears. The way was open!

She drew back and caught up the can she had been forced to relinquish when lifting the stone out of the way. Holding it to her breast, she crawled up out of the square hole and gained her feet.

"Be careful," she hissed to Jean. "Don't let your can strike. Here—hand it up to me."

She found it thrust to her and set it to one side. The boy came up quickly behind it. She guided his hand back to the can.

"Take hold of my skirt and follow," she whispered, and turned to the tower stairs.

At last she trod familiar ground. Too many times as child, and maid, and woman, had she mounted here to lose her way or hesitate now in her going. She found the first step almost by instinct and began mounting, still carrying the can of oil hugged tight against her breast.

Up and up, 'round and 'round. Never had the way seemed so long in all her recollection. France was calling—calling. Did they think she would never heed the summons? And the bugle below was calling, too, calling to those who were enemies to France — calling them up to take arms against her.

Up and up, up and up. Her breath began to grow labored under her effort. Her limbs ached with the hurried mounting. The can in her arms grew more and more heavy.

"Mademoiselle," panted Jean's voice. "Mademoiselle — I — I can't. It is — too heavy—mademoiselle."

"You must," she whispered back hoarsely. "Jean, you must—for France."

"*Oui.*"

His voice was a whimper, but his hand still dragged at her skirt, telling that he followed.

Her heart was pounding. Her throat ached and seemed bursting from the mad rush up the darkened stairs. She drove herself around another turn, and the unseen steps ended.

The top! Staggering rather than walking, she made her way out on the floor where

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she and Fitzmaurice had spent the afternoon.

The afternoon! It was then the man had voiced the words from which her great idea had been born. As they climbed the stair, he had likened the inside of the tower to a huge flue, and told of the lighting of church spires in Belgium to direct artillery fire. And that was the great idea itself.

Martout had said as large a beacon as might be. Well, she would make him a beacon which would throw its light over the château and the court, and the trenches where the gray-clad foe was lying as well. The guns of France should have a mark at which to shoot, which they could not mistake. The tower was old, its woodwork dry as tinder. Its stone walls were a mighty chimney. The door at its bottom, half wrecked, would give ample draft. This tower—the shrine of her childhood, her maidenhood, the shrine where her love had come upon her and given her the accolade of woman—she would fire with her own hand. Its blazing top should be her beacon, her sacrifice to France! So would she light the path!

There was a trap-door in the conical wooden roof, left for the purpose of gaining the cover in case of needed repairs. It was on the side to the west. How it all worked out to her need! Even the door was where it should be. She caught Jean's hand as he followed her closely, and led him to the wall.

"I shall lift you up in my arms," she told him quickly. "Hunt for the catch of the little door in the roof and push it open. Then crawl out on the roof yourself, and I will hand you up the can. Take off the cover and pour the oil over the shingles. Do you understand?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," he assured her.

"You're not afraid to go out there and do it?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"Come then." She caught him about the body and raised him as high as her strength could compass. "Do you feel the trap-door, Jean? Feel quickly."

"No, mademoiselle. I am feeling. I can't—yes, yes, I have found it. Now I have the catch."

"Open it quickly, Jean, quickly," she panted. "I—can't hold you—very long."

She strained upward against the weight of his body, calling upon the last reserve of her endurance, as it seemed. She must hold him so—she would—she would. Surely he could be but a moment longer.

She staggered. Her ears were drumming. Her arms shook and trembled as she forced them to their task. She heard the rasp of wood on wood. The weight in her arms grew greater for a tortured second—lightened.

"I shall draw myself outside now, mademoiselle," said Jean, and slipped quite beyond her grasp.

Looking upward, she saw a dim rectangle studded with stars, against which the boy's body moved. Abruptly his voice came down again in a whisper.

"Now, mademoiselle, the can, if you please."

She lifted and thrust it up at arm's length. She saw Jean bend downward in shadowy outline through the trap. The can left her stretching fingers and she stood alone.

With a gasp of relief she turned back across the floor. How well she knew it! Even in the dark she made her way unerringly to the chair where she had sat and listened to those first words of stammered love. There, too, was the box on which *he* had sat. She dragged them against each other, bent despite her haste of action and kissed the back of the chair in farewell. She began, then, piling other broken chairs and boxes upon those first two, until she had a good-sized heap.

Taking the can she herself had carried, she unscrewed its top and poured the contents over the pile she had built and the floor about it. When the can was quite empty, she ran back below the open trap-door.

"Jean!" she called softly. "Jean!"

"Yes, mademoiselle. Shall I light it now?"

"You have a match?"

"Of course, mademoiselle."

"Then crawl quite to the edge of the trap-door, strike your match inside the roof, light the oil and drop down here at once."

She clasped her hands and stood waiting. It was almost finished. In one instant more the beacon would be lighted. But she did not falter. Rather she urged haste.

"Quickly, Jean, quickly!" she admonished the boy above her.

A match sparkled into blue flame over her head, as she strained her eyes upward. The boy was kneeling on the very edge of

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the trap. The tiny glow of the match moved outward beyond her vision to be followed by a swift flare as the oil on the roof caught in a spurt of spreading flame. Jean's body shot downward, to hang at arms' length briefly, and drop at her feet.

"Come!" she cried as he scrambled up.

Like him she had brought matches. Lighting one against the stone wall, she returned to the oil-soaked pile of furniture and boxes on the floor.

"Good-by," she whispered and dropped the match into its heaped-up midst. It flickered and caught, and burst suddenly into a pillar of fire, gathered volume with the swiftness of an explosion and leaped in hot, licking tongues which lapped the inside of the burning roof. A vivid flare of burning oil spread in a pool of flame in the center of the floor, lighting up the whole interior with quivering light.

For one brief moment Jacqueline stood watching. Her eyes turned slowly from the dancing flames and swept about the well-known place where so many long hours of her budding life had been spent.

"Good-by," she whispered again, "oh, good-by," and caught Jean's hand in her own, leading him toward the stairs.

They ran down swiftly, now that their work was done. Behind them the roof burst into a hundred tongues of fire, which brightened to throw a dull red glow over all the château and on across the newly dug trenches, as the flames leaped up toward the sky. The path was lighted! Its beacon stood a vivid pillar of fire against the night.

XI

CRASH, crash — crash, crash — crash, crash!

The whole night so silent not long before, save for the voice of a cricket shrilling somewhere in sibilant cadence, became suddenly simply the vortex of a maelstrom of grinding, rending sound to Jacqueline, running rapidly down the tower stairs, with the hot hand of the boy fast in her own. So quickly as that did France answer the fiery signal which was already beginning to roar dully over the heads of the boy and woman, with an ever-brightening glare.

Crash, crash—crash, crash—crash, crash! Batteries of field-guns, firing in sections, each at a somewhat different angle, were sweeping the trenches and the ground beyond them with a spreading shrapnel hell.

Roar! A deeper, heavier note—the voice of a heavy French cannon, hurling its great shell. Chaos! the note of the shells' explosion, drowning all else for the moment, setting walls to rocking, filling the ears with a rending reverberation, which drove the drums inward to deadness and seemed to shake the very senses ere it died.

The boy beside the woman whimpered, a plaint of inarticulate terror wrung in involuntary outcry from his lips. Keeping fast hold of his hand, Jacqueline raced on and down, around and around, to regain the open mouth of the tunnel and run back through its length to the room behind the kitchen. As she passed them, the light of the fire above her began to shine in through the old, old slits in the stone sides of the tower as faint red reflections. The flash, flash of the shrapnel explosions shot through in stabs of sudden brilliance, like the flicker of lightning, whose thunder was their ear-stabbing detonations. Again Jean whimpered in words:

"Mademoiselle — I — I am afraid now, mademoiselle."

"Come," she panted back. "We must get back to the tunnel, Jean. Hurry, Jean, hurry!"

A new sound struck on her ear even as she spoke. Inside the tower, snapping out above the outer roar and rend of explosions, the staccato call of a bugle, the dull diapason of men's voices, came the sound of heavy footsteps pounding on stone. It echoed in the throat of the place as a new note of menace. Some one—several persons, to judge by the sound, were rushing up the darkened stairs toward herself and the boy.

Comprehension came even as she sensed their approach. Soldiers were mounting to attack and quench the pillar of fire she had lighted to guide her nation through the night!

She paused, gasping in sudden horror of her position. The sensation of a trapped creature assailed her briefly. Then she gathered her staggering wits in a desperate consideration of her plight. Above her head the fire raged in growing fury. Below, the rage of mankind mounted against her and Jean, no less cruel, no less pitiless in its way than the fire itself, should they fall into its grasp.

A third avenue presented to her struggling

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senses. In a flash it came to her rescue. Where the stairs spiraled about the inside wall, several of the tower's separate floors had been built into central rooms. To find the door of such a room and slip inside while the upward-climbing men dashed by —by that way lay possible safety.

She flung herself against the inner wall which marked the limits of a room on the floor where she stood. Groping, feeling, sliding desperate hands along it, she searched for the saving portal, fumbling her way on and on along the wall, while her heart pounded in her ears in heavy blows of blood, little less audible than the pound of boots coming nearer and nearer up the stairs.

At last her fingers fell upon the door. Throwing her weight against it, she forced it open by a frantic effort, thrust Jean before her and followed, to sink down in a gasping heap upon the floor, behind its shield.

Hoarse gutturals came to her ears as she crouched there, the close panting of men running up, slipping and stumbling and cursing in the darkness. Then they were past, still mounting, while she knelt with the boy clinging against her, her breath caught fast in her throat.

She reached out and put her arms about Jean, gathering him to her. There was comfort in the human contact for them both. They knelt there in the darkness of the room, clinging together and waiting, while the night split with mingled sounds, to which a new note was being added—a dull, heavy pulsing which throbbed and died and throbbed again.

Like the great flue to which Fitzmaurice had compared it, the old tower was beginning to give off a dull reverberatory voice, roaring its own death-song from its age-hoarsened throat as it spat forth its life in fire.

Through it, the feet were coming back. No use to seek to quench the pyre of the tower in dissolution. They turned back and plunged down the way they had come. In a harsh clatter they pounded past the door behind which their tender quarry crouched, and ran on down toward the courtyard, where their comrades huddled under the shrapnel hail.

When the last thudding footfall was gone, Jacqueline Chinault crept out of her refuge and once more gained the stair, advancing less rapidly along its stone treads, until she had gone half-way around the tower from the room.

There she paused again and stood listening with strained intentness, ready to go on or run back as the need might arise. Yet, despite her known peril both from fire and men, she smiled as she stood, and her eyes lightened with something more than the glow of the fire through the time-aged slits —with the glow of accomplished purpose, which nothing to come could change.

She thrilled there in the fire-shot darkness with the divine fire of a service performed, and once more caught in a deep breath which lifted her young bust high. Come what might, her watch had been strong and true—she had kept her promise. Nothing could change that. No one might whisper that she had failed.

And just what might come she did not know now any longer. She had left the great stone lying beside the mouth of the tunnel, both in her haste to ascend and accomplish her task, and because she did not know if she could raise it should she close it, and had no time to seek to determine the fact.

If, however, the men who had been sent to extinguish the fire had seen it and closed it again, her way of escape was cut off. Or perhaps they would be guarding it merely, waiting for the inevitable time when she must descend, as the fire burned down from floor to floor. Or they might even have gone down and through the tunnel.

Her eyes darkened slightly at the latter thought. Would her aunt fall a victim to their revenge, and old Pierre and Marthe? Was the sacrifice to be on them, too, as well as on her home?

Close by where she stood, a narrow window was let into the outer wall. The light of the mounting flames flickered dully through it, seeming to brighten and dim in time with the harsh roar of the tower itself.

Jacqueline crept to it and looked out. The glare from above showed her the courtyard, glinted ruddy on the helmets of armed men packed there to withstand the assault. A shell had exploded against the western wall of the court and breached it in a great ragged gap, backed by tumbled stones and overthrown trestles on which had been placed the defenders' platforms. And mixed with trestles and stones were the distorted, half-buried figures of men, caught and borne down in the sudden destruction.

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Some wind had come up with the approach of morning. It caught the smoke from the burning tower and swung it in choking, trailing banners above the court full of men, blurring and half concealing them for a moment, lifting again like a swinging curtain, to show them massed back of the gap in the wall, still waiting for the assault they knew must come.

The tower shook to its base. A great flare of fire started up beyond the wall itself. Before Jacqueline's eyes, it seemed that the thick stone structure she had known since the days of her first baby staring bowed inward, split into a thousand fragments. The line of men standing behind it on still firm trestles appeared to rise in the air, in whirling, writhing units, to fall back in helpless impotence, dropping down on a fresh pile of stone which now backed a second breach in the wall.

And then, while the men in the court shuffled and drew back momentarily from that fiery center of destruction, right in their packed midst grew a mushroom of flaring, darting fire, rolled in a vast white blanket of smoke, from which by degrees emerged a tangled pile of legs and arms and bodies, heaped in blended death, where an instant before had been ranks of stalwart beings, strong, ready, in the full tide of life.

A shouting grew. Drawn by men, running, lunging, struggling over and through the new corpses of the courtyard, a machine-gun lumbered over the flags, was wrenched through the red ruck and forced into position back of one of the breaches.

Another followed hard on the trail of the first, crushing a heedless path over what had been men so short a time before. It, too, was faced about and planted back of the second ragged gap she had seen torn through the solid stones. Its crew tugged and strained and labored in superhuman exertion to bring it where it might command the fresh danger-point through which the attack must come.

THIS was war! This thing, where men stood huddled thickly and waited and were shot down by guns far beyond their reach, torn limb from limb, mangled, rent, shattered; where they fell in heaps of dead and dying to be crushed yet farther by the iron wheels of other guns in the hands of their own comrades, without a thought; this inferno of sound, of shooting and shouting, where the night grew brilliant from the death flash of shells, the air sibilant from the whistle of shrapnel, spraying out and over and down; where men wept and cursed and prayed, labored and struggled and died—was war!

And this court beneath her sick eyes, where men writhed and swayed like fiends in the pit of some storied inferno, was a mere glimpse, an infinitesimal portion of the major conflict which was waging across the far fields.

Out there beyond the court other sounds told of other similar scenes, where the men in the trenches held on and struggled under a metal hail to drive back the attack of other men like themselves, who sought to drive them out from their positions and force them back. If the skirmish of the morning had thrilled her, this struggle appalled. She turned her face back to the boy at her side, to find him clinging to the sill of the window with both hands, staring out, silent and wide-eyed.

He turned up his face.

"See," he panted in excitement. "See, mademoiselle—over there on the steps."

Jacqueline shifted her gaze. In front of the château door a body of men were standing in a closely gathered group. There was no mistaking their personnel, or the figure above whose face gleamed the golden eagle on his helmet, about whom hung the long, gray cloak of the Prussian officer in the field. He was standing among his staff, surveying the scene in the courtyard. She recognized the quondam Colonel Fredreich, director of her country's foes on this part of the front.

Even while she watched, she saw one of the men about him lift an arm and gesture toward the open door at their back. It seemed to her that he appealed to his superior to seek shelter within.

Fredreich shook his head in impatient protest. He was physically brave then, for he must know his danger in that shell-swept court. Yet he stood unmoved, watching the men before him, more as a spectator than an active participant in the struggle.

Another shell burst not far from him, taking its toll from the living. The rest stood firm, apparently unmoved by the sudden death. Another flashed out, as it seemed, directly against one of the machine-guns where the gunners were still toiling to get it into position. The smoke of its bursting

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passed and showed the gunners quiet, the gun itself sagged to one side on a broken wheel, its muzzle slanting drunkenly up at the sky.

Fredreich lifted an arm and pointed. A shrill whistle began its skirling through the uproar. The huddled men in the courtyard ran forward in close-set ranks, some mounting the still standing trestles, others taking positions at the breaches, back of and even in irregular lines across the piles of broken stone.

As abruptly as it had broken out, the vicious gun-fire died down. Jacqueline saw Fredreich point again toward the west. Then slowly and without haste, he gathered his cloak about him and descended the steps to cross toward the eastern gate and disappear beneath it.

As he went, a sound of shrill, high-pitched yelling burst forth. It rose and sank and rose again in the blended volume of many human throats baying their own advance.

The lines near the wall back of the breaches stiffened. With a sudden grip in her breast, a dull-seeming contraction of her heart in horror, Jacqueline sensed it as the voice of the attack, crying itself through the fire-shot night. Somewhere out there, the French were rushing forward to storm the shrapnel-raked trenches, and the shell-torn wall. The time for gun-fire had passed while she watched, and now it was time for the final desperate grapple, man to man, while the long, keen bayonets flashed.

She saw the crew of the one machine-gun, back of a breach, working about it in a frenzied haste. Of a sudden it cut loose in a grinding roar, made up and shot through by a myriad of separate explosions. Briefly it drowned out that frantic yelling, and then the voices of many men seemed to mount even above its furious snarling and come nearer and nearer. The rifles of the men on the trestles and crouched on the ragged heaps of stones began to crackle.

Again the tower shook and trembled. This time, however, the cause appeared to her quivering senses to be from within. A heavy cracking and creaking filled the darkness where she stood. It was followed at once by a grating, grinding fall. For a moment the light of the fire sank, so that the whole blurred picture of the court before her paled into a half light. Then it flared up brighter even than before.

She realized clearly what had happened. The upper floor having burned through, had fallen upon that below it. Little by little the fire was eating its way down over her head, making her peril greater. No matter what might lie below, she could not stay where she was much longer. She gave a final glance through the window.

The pandemonium of shots and yells kept up. In a sudden surge, she saw red and blue forms leap through the ragged rent in the wall. They sprang in with the long knives of their bayonets thrust and pushed forward, cutting and stabbing at the gray bodies of the men who opposed them, lunging and drawing back and lunging again, parrying and jabbing, so quickly that she could not follow, and took it all in as a wild jumble of savage rage, rather than in any detail. But it fired her, roused her from the almost pralyzing spell of horror, which had chained her and held her.

Red and blue were the colors of French soldiers. Those long, flashing bits of steel were the bayonets of France. The flood of French advance was lapping the ragged gaps in the wall, dashing against the gray wall of German resistance, dashing up and up, and——

Or no! Like the pulse of the fire she had lighted, her spirit sank again. The attack at the breach where the machine-gun sputtered had failed. Those red and blue forms which had pushed in at the other, had been cut down. Their brilliant colors had dropped and mingled with the somber gray of their victims on the tumbled piles of stone. They were cut off, driven back. Their yelling had died. Save for the rattle of the small arms, the two forces struggled almost in silence under the flare of her fire.

Yet she was roused. That fire was eating steadily down, burning more fiercely as it sank. A soft wind had begun to fan past her and the boy where they had waited and watched. It was the draft from the open door below, sucked up through the tower, to whip the flames to a greater destruction.

If she were to escape and gain safety for the lad who had come of his own accord to help her, she must attempt it soon. And surely, she thought, there could be no better time than now, when the men in the court were exerting every energy to repel the men who attacked.

"Come," she whispered to Jean, still clinging by the window.

She caught his hand once more in hers

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and began to creep on down the stairway.

Jean looked back toward the point of vantage he had lost.

"They will win, mademoiselle?" he questioned. "They have been driven back this once, but they will come again, think you not?"

"They must," said the girl, drawing him on beside her. "They must. Jean—oh, Jean, they must—come back."

The door to the tower stood open. Through it as she paused just at the last turn of the stairs, she caught a glimpse of the lighted court where the Germans still fought for possession. The human sound of the conflict swept in and about her in an increased volume with her nearness—shouts, cries, mouthings of rage and fear and terror, of anger and pain, shrieks and screams, the muffled jumble of heavy feet on the stones, the massed panting and breathing of men, and over all, the rattle of rifle-fire, the renewed snarl of the machine-gun—more yells.

A dim light stole in also and showed her anxious eyes the flagstone, still lying free of the mouth of the tunnel. Those who had entered and mounted to the top had evidently taken no time to bother with it. The attack had been too sudden, too pressing. They had passed it by and so left her way of escape still open. A little prayer of thanksgiving stirred in her heart as she found it so.

But between her and it lay the distance from where she stood to the mouth of the tunnel itself. At any moment while they crossed it, the boy at her side and herself might be discovered and swift reprisal fall even now upon them. Yet delay would gain them nothing.

Taking a firmer grip on the hand in her own, she went down one step and another—and another, till the outer light shone in fully upon her. Her feet touched the stones of the floor at last. A swift rush, and safety.

"Come," she panted as it seemed to her she had been doing for long hours, and began to drag Jean forward across the floor.

With a strangled cry, she paused. A figure reeled in through the door of the tower, from the court. It was that of a fair-haired youth, his round face wide-eyed, his lips a strange purple in the half light, set and pressed together as he stumbled toward her.

One hand still clung to a rifle, the butt of which dragged on the stones. The other was raised and forced into his side, through the ill-fitting fabric of his blouse. And below the wedging fist there were dark streaks and blotches on the cloth.

He lurched through the door, turned his head and stared directly at Jacqueline and Jean. He halted and remained standing and staring.

Quite slowly his contracted mouth relaxed into something like a smile. His gun fell and rattled on the flagging. He lifted both hands and stretched them toward what seemed to his dulling brain like a woman.

"*Mutter!*" he cried aloud, lunged forward and fell on his face.

Her heart bursting with horror, her knees knocking one against the other, Jacqueline knew he had died. Abruptly she woke to action. Before that huddled thing, she swept Jean into her arms, crushing him to her as some mother had once perhaps gathered the form of the youth on the floor, and fled in long steps toward the screening dark oblong of the tunnel.

Still holding him to her, she dropped down, turned about and thrust a searching leg below her for the top of the first step which would carry them out of that region of madness, where men were shot and thrust through and cried to their mothers and died.

When she found it, she threw all her weight on that limb and slipped the other down to join it. Not until she stood in the utter blackness of the lower passage, did she put the boy down, or know that she was sobbing dryly, with catch after catch of choking emotion in breast and throat.

Faint, far away now as it seemed from the angle at which she heard it, came once more the sound of that high-charging outcry.

"They are coming back *now*—mademoiselle," said Jean Giroux at her side.

"Come," she once more made answer. It seemed she could say nothing else, that her brain was too full of wild surging emotions to seek for other means of expression save that one short word.

She turned and began to grope down one wall, guiding her progress with her hands against the stones, sensing rather than hearing the patter of Jean's feet as he crept along at her back. Groping, stumbling, but always advancing, they went forward toward the room at the end and the bed in front of the panel, and so out through it at the last to find the candle still burning, and Pierre

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and Marthe huddled on chairs beside the bed—waiting.

MADAME ST. DIE turned her eyes as Jacqueline appeared. She nodded slowly.

"No need to ask if you did what you went for," she remarked. "Our ears have given evidence of that. I sent Pierre up to tell me what was going on, but he ran back, saying it was dangerous to remain, as no doubt it was."

The old man nodded.

"But yes; terrible things are going on up there, mademoiselle. A great shell came through the dining-room wall and struck one of those drunken officers and killed him. He lies there now on the floor with the broken glasses and bottles. And there is a huge hole in the wall, one could drive a cow through to pasture. Had the shell exploded we would all have died, I am sure. We should have been crushed by the falling walls. It would have torn the house to pieces! I did not see the shell—only the dead man and the hole in the wall, and then I returned. It appeared unsafe to remain longer."

Sounds which floated to them gave audible confirmation of his words. Shots, the report of cannon once more firing, shouts and yells, and the growling murmur of many human atoms locked in deadly strife, came from the outer world where the conflict still raged.

The invalid shrugged as Pierre ceased speaking.

"I imagine a shell hit the wall and drove a portion of it inward. The man was probably killed by a bit of flying stone. Well, child, well, do we win?"

And as if in answer, there swept through the room a new note, unheard until now—the ringing sound of full-throated cheering, rising in exultant volume, sinking, rising again, shrill, clear, unmarked by the gruffer gutturals of the Teuton, the higher cadence of Frankish voices raised in triumphant cry.

Jacqueline straightened and stood while it rang out and sank and rang again. Her breast rose in a great, gasping inhalation. Her eyes darkened and flashed with the sudden fire of conviction. She turned then toward the woman on the bed.

"Do you hear it!" she cried, overborne by her excitement. "*Do* you hear it? That is our answer. The French are cheering. The French!"

In a rush she had reached the door and darted through it, running across the kitchen and up the stairs to the hall.

Up there a lamp still burned in the smoke-clogged air and the lighted court showed full of red- and blue-clad men, streaming past the open door of the hall and pressing on toward the farther gate to the east. They ran singly and in groups, their faces eager, lighted by the still flaring tower, and there were only red and blue figures now. The gray-clad forms which had filled the court when last she saw it, seemed to have completely disappeared.

It was true, then. France had carried the wall, stormed the breaches, won the position. The cheers she had heard had been victory's cry. Jacqueline's heart leaped and the fire in her eyes deepened and glowed. They had followed the path she had lighted. She had fired the beacon and France had responded—France!

The door of the dining-room stood open. She glanced in. As Pierre had said, a great hole gaped in the wall and the dead German lay sprawled on the floor between it and the table. She saw him dimly in the light of another murky lamp far back on a serving-table in a corner, set amid bottles of wine.

She turned from the picture. The red and blue groups were still charging through the courtyard. Some of them had taken off their red *kepis* and were waving them as they ran. Behind them the cannon still belched sharply, throwing their shells above them to fall amid the retreating foe. Suddenly rifle-fire rattled out to the east in a crashing ripple of fresh sound.

And suddenly out of the red-and-blue masses, swarming past before her eyes, appeared a figure clad in the tan of khaki, which turned off and bounded up the steps at a leap, and sprang in through the door. It was that of a man whose eyes darted this way and that in a questing fashion as he ran toward her down the hall.

And then he caught sight of her and cried her name, springing toward her through the smoke-fogged air.

"Jacqueline! Jacqueline! Thank God—you're here—you're safe!"

She ran to meet him, catching him with her hands and clinging to him while his arms went around her, and she lifted her face.

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"Maurice," she faltered, half laughing, half sobbing, only to have the word crushed on her lips by his.

"You're quite all right?" said Fitzmaurice after that moment of meeting. "Oh, girl, how I have worried! But, oh, Lord, what a target you gave us! When it flashed you ought to have heard Martout swear. He cursed by all the *sacrés* of France that there was no woman anywhere like you, and, by gad! he's right. It was a wonderful thing to do—that firing of the tower—that directing with your own hands the fire of the guns against both yourself and your aunt. It's thing from the pages of romance itself. You offered your home, your breast, your heart, as a target for France. There isn't—there never will be—any one quite like you."

Jacqueline flushed. Her eyes dropped. Then and then only she sighted the blood-stained wrapping about Fitzmaurice's left hand—the same hand she had held in the tower, in the midst of their make-believe.

And, as then, she caught it in her own, save that now all the anxiety of the woman for the loved one was alive in her voice and eyes.

"Maurice!" she panted. "You are hurt! What is it? Tell me—tell me."

Fitzmaurice smiled. The spirit of whimsy came into his face, making it once more utterly boyish.

"Prithee, fair lady, 'tis nothing," said he. " 'Tis at worst but a scratch, clumsily wrapped by myself. 'Twill fare better I fancy, if so be it is wound in a silken scarf."

Jacqueline Chinault laughed with a laugh which caught in its beginning, and went on and caught again, and broke in something like a sob. She lifted the hand in both of hers and laid it against her, pressing it to her, over her heart.

"Maurice," she begged, "don't make light of it, my dear one. Don't try to spare me. Tell me how badly you are injured. What is it? How bad?"

"A bullet clean through," said Fitzmaurice quite gently. "Never even saw the bullet. I caught it, but it got away—was going too beastly fast to hold. I wrapped up the hand and kept right on coming. I wanted to get here and find out about you. Nothing to worry about, girlie, really, though it will stop me from flying for a few days, I suppose."

Her eyes leaped to his. Her voice dropped, and grew deeper, richer, fuller, with a quiver of yearning in its timbre.

"A few days? Maurice—oh, Maurice—will you spend them here—with me?"

XII

IT WAS finished. So far as Château Chinault was concerned the thing was over and done. The gray light of a new day was creeping up over the hills to the north and east.

For hours, as it seemed to her tired mind and body, Jacqueline and Marthe, Pierre and Jean, and Fitzmaurice who insisted on following her about and would not let her out of his sight, had carried bedding and featherbeds and mattresses from bedrooms and storerooms, and laid them in rows in the drawing-room and the hall and even in the courtyard under hastily stretched canvas shelters.

And while they labored, men with brassards about their arms on which glowed the red cross of Geneva, were busy bearing red- and blue- and gray-clad forms and laying them down on the extemporized pallets thus afforded. To and fro they moved from courtyard and trench and back again, winnowing the living and wounded from the dead; at first by the light of lanterns, and now under the first faint fingers of the dawn.

In the dining-room, in the light of many lamps, collected and set for the purpose, surgeons worked at their grim tasks of mercy and saving. Into that room went stretcher after stretcher, men limping alone, men aided by a comrade, hanging pallid-lipped, pinched-faced on a supporting arm, sometimes seeking to smile as the better choice to a groan.

Out of that room came bandaged men, walking or borne in the merciful sleep of the anesthetic, or white and drawn from the ordeal sustained without its blunting aid.

And in the shambles of the courtyard, too, worked other parties, lifting and bearing away the burden of the slain, taking them down to the trenches where still other men worked with shovels, as they had about that other trench the day before.

Jacqueline's eyes grew dark, grew soft and moist with compassion, as the rows of wounded bodies grew steadily longer and longer with each fresh addition. The maternal in woman, which makes her yearn to soothe and succor suffering and pain, drove

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her to seek some means of bringing some little comfort to those pain-racked forms of men whose bravery she had witnessed during that hour of horror when they swarmed to the attack.

And in her desire to help, she turned, woman-like, to the man out of them all whom she herself loved, whose presence close beside her made her strangely happy amid those gripping scenes of pain.

"What can I do? Isn't there something —some little thing I can do to help them?" she questioned Fitzmaurice. "Oh, Maurice —I want to—to do something. What?"

He answered her promptly:

"Coffee. Strong, hot coffee, for all of them able to drink it. The Dutchmen have the idea fast enough in keeping their men's stomachs full of hot fluid."

Jacqueline nodded acceptance of his advice. Calling Pierre, she sent him to the storerooms, and herself took Marthe and Maurice down to the kitchen to put great kettles of water on the stove to boil. While it was heating she and the Lieutenant, his hand now neatly bandaged, wrapped coffee in bits of clean cloth and dropped the packages so formed into the scalding water to bob about and steep out their flavor and strength.

While they worked, Fitzmaurice told her and her aunt, who insisted upon their presence in her room, of the attack: How, drawing back quickly, they had come up with a column hurrying to their support; how the earlier reinforcements promised had been diverted to a sadly pressed part of the line, where they turned the tide of battle at a critical moment; how not only here but elsewhere the tide of invasion had been checked, held, even turned back; how still west and to the north, the army of Paris itself had rushed out and thrown itself as a last impetus against the gray hordes and hurled them backward in a confusion amounting, according to reports, to almost a rout; how when the column had been met they had turned around and stolen back, moving with the utmost caution, slipping down on the unsuspecting force at the château with scarcely a sound, until they were as close as they dared come lest they be prematurely discovered.

He then related how the guns had been trained as nearly as might be without an actual guide, and how the gunners had stood by them waiting — waiting for the time chosen for the attack; how the infantry had lain down, sprawling on their arms, ready to leap up and rush the trenches and the château itself at a word; and what a splendid mark had been given for their fire by the flaming tower!

"That was a wonderful inspiration," he made an end. "It took a cool head to think of and carry it through. It not only gave us a mark, but lit up the whole country. How'd you ever come to think of it, dear girl?"

Jacqueline flushed.

"You gave me the idea yourself, when you likened the tower to a chimney, Maurice."

"By Jove!" said Fitzmaurice, eying her in palpable admiration, and spilling coffee on the floor. "By Jove!"

Madame St. Die sniffed.

"I think some of that coffee is ready," she remarked with suggestion.

Thereafter Marthe and Pierre and Jean bore great pots of the hot black beverage from the kitchen up the stairs where Jacqueline and Fitzmaurice took it and doled it out in cups to the wounded, and sent more to the heavy-eyed infantry who remained in possession, while the bulk of the French force pushed on after the retreating Germans. Had there been any doubt as to whether the château was to be held, it would have vanished as the gray light of day grew brighter.

For the stream of advance went on. Long lines of men, artillery still canvas-covered, of ammunition wagons, of cavalry, of supply motors and buses commandeered from the streets of Paris, came on and on from the west, moving steadily into the east, to hold what was gained and drive the advantage farther and farther home without delay.

It was of such things the man and the girl spoke as they moved along the line of hastily laid down pallets, lifting helpless shoulders, holding the cups of coffee to pain-twisted lips, watching the eager clutch of them over the edge of the cups to reach the resting fluid, meeting the dumb thanks of eyes, the mumbled thanks of tongues.

And it was such news, which set dulled eyes to flashing again, brought gleams of teeth from between the lips of endurance, a rally of vital force to the spur of new words of advance, in place of retreat.

Numbers of lesser wounded volunteered

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their aid in the task of ministering to their more sorely stricken comrades. But over the graver cases, Jacqueline insisted on hovering in person, moving like a good angel of comfort through the lines of pain, where the only sound was of suffering now, the only desire for the gentle hand, the softer tone —and rest.

Yet there were lighter incidents even there—little sidelights, as it were, on human nature—like the giant gaunt private who burst from the room where the surgeons worked, smoking a short, black pipe, swearing strange oaths and waving a bandaged hand, which he paused to thrust before Jacqueline's eyes.

"Look, mademoiselle," he bellowed. "I have lost a finger. An infernal piece of something or other bit it off. The surgeon says I am to go back to a hospital because of the fact. Sent back, do you hear, for a thing like that. *Nom d'un nom!* Have I not seven fingers and two perfectly good thumbs yet to give to France? Am I to be disgraced before my comrades? *Nom Dieu!* I shall report myself to my company and go on fighting, and I shall kill seven Germans for each finger I lose."

And there was the bed on the floor, which Jacqueline reached with Fitzmaurice beside her, on which lay a youth whose face seemed strangely familiar, as his eyes turned up to hers.

Not until he spoke, however, did she know him; and then came recollection all at once.

"*Hola*, mademoiselle!" he remarked as she knelt beside him with her cup in hand. "I stand not so straight as I did yesterday morning when we spoke in the hall."

Then Jacqueline knew. He was the little sentry who had been posted outside the dining-room door, when Fitzmaurice went in to make his report to the major. He had told her about his sweetheart, and how the girl called Mimi had wept when he left for his depot to join the forces in the field. That was before love had come to herself, but the recollection gave a personal note to her question as she answered:

"And are you badly hurt?"

"A bayonet thrust through the leg," he said simply. "But all the same I am lucky. It will heal, and Mimi no doubt will think me quite a hero. She will be proud, don't you think?"

"Of course she will," said Jacqueline, slipping an arm under his head and setting her cup to his lips.

"Because," he went on after he had drunk, "our *Capitaine*, just before the charge, told us the first man through the breach in the wall would have his name sent up for the cross of the Legion. *Mon Dieu!* I was not the first as it happened, but I was the first to get through and live, and of what good would the 'cross' be to the others? I hope I shall win it. After victory comes, Mimi and I shall tell our children how their father won it. But that is a long look ahead —we are not yet married. Still, it is a fine thought, is it not?"

Jacqueline nodded. She didn't know just whether she wanted to cry or laugh. She put down the boy's head and stood up. He was the last at the end of the line.

She turned to find Fitzmaurice waiting with an empty pot in his hands. She found his eyes upon her in a strange expression. It came to her that he had heard the words of the little sentry. An odd little quiver thrilled through her beneath that new look in his eyes.

Despite the weariness of body and limb and brain, induced by the strain of the night and all which had followed, a soft color crept up and dyed her throat and the white of her cheeks to her hair. She pointed to the empty pot in his hands and turned away, walking quickly, with that queer, small tremor once more shaking her being.

Fitzmaurice followed her quite down to the kitchen. They filled the pot and made one more trip, this time out to the courtyard, where the more slightly wounded were now sitting under awnings of canvas and swapping tales of the action, smoking, chattering, laughing, even beginning a game of cards. The courtyard had been cleared of all its grim reminders save the tumbled piles of rock back of the breaches and certain dull spots on the stones. Even the wrecked machine-gun had been dragged outside.

Fitzmaurice set down his pot of coffee and told the men to help themselves. Then, taking Jacqueline by the arm, he led her slowly across the court toward the door of the tower itself. It had burned itself out. Save for a feather of smoke rising above its stone rim and drifting idly upward, there was little to speak from without of the part it had played.

At the door the Englishman paused and

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stared in at the ruin which had been wrought.

"I still don't understand just how you got in here to light it," he remarked. "But you did say to Martout and me that you thought you knew of a way. How did you manage?"

She smiled.

"It was simple." Briefly she told him of the tunnel below them. "Its end lies under those half-burned timbers, there, Maurice." Her lips drooped. "My poor tower! It is burned quite out."

"It served a splendid purpose," said the man.

Jacqueline nodded.

"Yes, I know. But, oh, Maurice, I hated so to light it. It was mine. All my life I have loved it. It was so full of memories—of the things we spoke of up there yesterday afternoon. And of them all, to me the very last was the best. I couldn't have done it if it hadn't been for France. You see, Maurice, women are like that. First they have to love a thing very much, and then—then if they do love it very much—oh, ever and ever so much, they will sacrifice themselves for the thing they love, just as I sacrificed my dear tower for France, or a mother will suffer anything to save her baby, or a woman will suffer with and for the man she loves."

The man thrilled at her words. But he made no immediate answer. He stood and gazed out toward the eastern hills, where the light was steadily growing. At length he spoke:

"And yet, but for what you did, the sacrifice you made, the new day coming up over there might have showed a different sight to us here. It was you, dear, who won for France, as much as her men.

"Yesterday, for the first time, France checked the invasion at all parts of the line. You made it possible for her to do it here. This growing dawn is that of a new day for your country—in which she sees the threatened danger averted at least for a time. And because of what came to us up there in the tower, it is a new day for you and for me—for us—the first new day of our love."

She drew closer to him, stood by his side and let her eyes turn also where he looked. They stood beside each other, a man and a woman, with their faces turned to the east and the dawn. The hush of that hour when day awakes seemed to hold them for the present, while great rose fingers shot up above the hills, which veiled the retiring wrack of battle. Those fingers painted the future for them of rose.

They were young, they loved. Of that greater future, held in the dark womb of time, they thought little just then. The present was theirs. Of the outcome of that Armageddon which had fallen across the land of Europe, they nor no man could speak for more than the present.

For them, for their nation, the grim march of events alone must spell the final end. And something of all that stirred in the breast of the girl as she stood by the side of the man.

"A new day," she said softly. "Its dawn is the color of roses." For a moment she let her tired body lean against him lightly. "The color of roses, my dear one. And I love it—our new day—and all the new days which are to be ours. And I love France, too, Maurice. But—" she turned to him wholly, with all her woman's soul shining out through her confession—"more than anything, better than anything else in all the world, Maurice, I love—just you."

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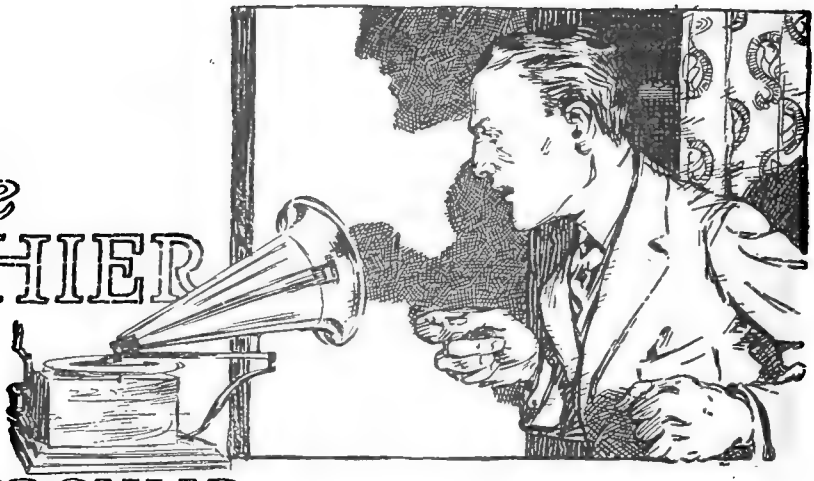
The CASHIER



by W. A. MACDONALD

NO CASHIER in the State that year knew when his turn would come. No bank but took some added precaution against the most daring criminal machine that ever stuck up a watchman or looted a safe. Jimmy Kelly had been killed at Spencer for refusing to open the vault; Ed Malone reached under the desk for a gun at Ardway and was left bleeding to death on the floor with a bullet through his face and another in his neck. The posses could do no business, the getaways were so quick and so well-planned.

The First National Bank of Denmore expected to face the music; so did every other bank.

The First National took every care with its cash. In the cage it had Dick Blake with a reputation for courage and a record of having shot a hold-up man who had him covered at the time. They said at Denmore that it meant trouble for the Halsey gang if they tried to get Dick Blake.

Blake had nerve, he could shoot and he kept an automatic so near his hand that it sometimes bothered his work; for he believed in that type of gun.

Everybody, therefore, was surprised when one morning a new man appeared in the cashier's cage. His name was Herrick, he was quiet, slender, a little above medium height, smooth-shaven, about thirty-five years old, slightly hard-looking, with a calm eye and an unassuming assurance of movement. Blake went off on his vacation a little early, to be sure, but without a grumble. Some said he was glad to be relieved of his place at a time when everybody in banking circles was keyed up to the breaking-point. The nerviest cashier feels the strain of constant expectation of attack.

At the same time no one saw any particular point of superiority in the new man, Herrick. The irregularity of incumbency was at first overlooked on the ground that he was probably a special agent of one of the big detective firms, chosen for his sand and quickness in an emergency. This impression waning, the first curiosity had worn off sufficiently to minimize the speculation about him. Blake was on a long vacation, the new man did nothing to attract attention; and the Halsey gang retired from the limelight, apparently having cleaned up enough loot to satisfy them for the time, or having decided conditions a little too precarious for their best work.

In his quiet way Herrick made some friends as any man will. Outside the bank he lived a normal life, read a good deal in his room, attended the movies when the bill was changed twice a week, and bought a graphophone with which he amused himself and his landlady's family.

His own taste ran to good music and he bought some excellent records. But he was not above listening to Harry Lauder of a Summer's evening, and he made eternal friends of Mrs. Glennon, his landlady, by

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putting on some blank records and letting her daughter, Lucy Glennon, sing into the horn her favorite songs which they afterward played for everybody who came in.

One day Lucy came into his room to tidy things when she thought he had started for work and found him talking into the machine himself, but she missed the words and he laughingly refused to play the record for her, saying the machine needed attention and he was going to take it to the store where he had bought it. Which he proceeded to do, starting off with the box under one arm and some records he wanted exchanged under the other. But, being a little late, he took the machine to the bank and didn't bring it back.

FOR a time Herrick apparently forgot about it and left it there on an unused table in a corner of the room, but then he began to do some night-work, and the Glennons and the bank employees had a good deal of fun accusing him of going to the bank nights to hear his own voice on the records. He laughed in friendly fashion. But the machine stayed on the table in the bank accumulating dust. There was a record on the disk, too, but certainly Herrick did not play it while anybody else was present and he didn't encourage any one else to play it at any time. Nor did he care to have graphophone or table moved or touched. People didn't think much about that, though, except the janitor, Leary.

Leary, cleaning up late one afternoon, became impatient with the presence of the machine which he thought bluntly had no place there.

"Say, Mr. Herrick, I'm going to move this music-can to the closet," he said and proceeded to lay hands upon the box.

He never moved it.

"Leave that alone, Leary," said a voice so steel hard and so sinister that the janitor looked up in sharp wonder not unmixed with fear.

He looked into a face hard, cruel, snarling and vicious as that of an Indian on the warpath. The janitor took his hands off the box muttering and shocked cold. When he looked up again the old Herrick looked at him with a smile.

"I mean I wish you wouldn't touch the thing for a while, Leary. I'll move it out of your way in a few days."

The janitor, who was a grouch, responded to the smile chiefly because of its contrast with the look he had just seen.

But the incident set him wondering and talking, too. His crude imagination and the real shock he had momentarily had from the pleasant Mr. Herrick of inoffensive manner conjured into his mind queer fancies. He took Jameson, the teller, aside next morning on the plea of having something important to communicate.

The point of his message came out after some rambling.

"I'll bet that fellow is Halsey himself, waiting for his chance to pull off something big," he insisted.

Jameson, startled, laughed after a minute and reassured the man.

"This bank didn't send Mr. Blake away to give Mr. Halsey, the bank robber, a chance to loot it," he said, smiling, and returned to his work.

And any faint uneasiness he might have had was wiped away by the arrival of the cheery and bright Mr. Herrick himself who greeted everybody with quiet amiability. Jameson looked the cashier over with interest, noting the slightly hard look of the lean face and the accurate play of his body when he walked, stooped, or worked at the desk, but saw nothing to be alarmed at in these attributes or the friendly quiet eyes with which Herrick looked up at him.

Blake was due back next day; he had been away a month. Herrick was expected to depart upon the regular cashier's return. The imminence of this event revived the speculation concerning the why and wherefore of Herrick. He had made his preparations for leaving town.

"What'll I do with the music-box?" asked Leary of him, motioning with his begrimed thumb toward the dusty table and the silent graphophone.

"Oh, leave it there, Leary. I'll take it over to the house tonight. Mrs. Glennon wants it."

The janitor, disappointed, grumbled away. He wanted it himself.

Blake wired he would be a few days late. Herrick nodded when told, and kept steadily at work. People had come to like him, and a good many told him they were sorry he was going. He thanked them all and smiled and made a few quiet, pleasant jokes. He was in his place as usual the following morning.

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That morning the First National Bank at Fanning fifteen miles north was stuck up, the cashier shot in the arm gratuitously, although he made no resistance, and twenty thousand dollars taken. The town of Denmore was all excited. The Halseys had been known to work towns close together, on the jump. They traveled by automobiles which they stole for the work.

Chief of Police Farrell put out his men. He sent two of the best to the bank. But no robbers came though the guard stayed on duty all day and all night. The Halseys had disappeared utterly from the map.

The passing of a day quieted the town, and the police retired again to their regular beats; they were not too well pleased at best with the prospect of meeting dead shots who never hesitated to kill.

THE cheerful sunshine of afternoon poured in a golden flood into the First National Bank of Denmore at nearly closing time. Jameson at his desk had turned sidewise for a smiling remark to one of the other men, when they came—the Halseys.

They came quickly with a blow and an oath. Young Manly, depositing for his father, the grocer, crashed down into the corner senseless, bleeding from the cut of brass-knuckles across his forehead. Jameson's smile froze upon his face. Herrick remained motionless in his cage.

Halsey, the chief, lunged toward him, his high voice slashing through the room, an automatic pistol nosing evilly out of his ruthless fist.

"Come across with your cash, you!" he shouted.

Behind him, gun in hand, strode his lieutenant, quick, vicious eyes sweeping the room.

Everybody was covered. Herrick's gun was a yard from his hand. The bandit's hand protruding through the wicket swept it away like a flash altogether.

"Shove out that coin now!" rang the strident command.

The stillness was suffocating, as Herrick's hands moved slowly and accurately toward the shining gold.

Suddenly from a far corner of the room a new voice spoke, icy and grim, commanding:

"Put up your hands!"

Both bandits wheeled like light, cursing.

A knife of flame traversed the room. There came the roar of quick explosions, indoors. Halsey's gun was gone, his fingers with it; his man reeled, shot through the back of the shoulder. He whirled again, trying to shift his gun to his other hand. The weapon was shot clean away from him.

Darkening the doorway, a third bandit slipped into the room—and plunged down thuddingly, his face upon the boards, his pistol clattering across the floor.

"Put up your hands!" said the voice from the corner. "Put up your hands! Put up your hands! Put up your hands!"

Herrick leaned over his desk quietly, his watchful eye surveying the scene over the automatic he had slipped from its armpit holster.

"Put up your hands! Put up your hands!" reiterated the cold voice.

"Jameson," said Herrick, "turn off that —— graphophone. It starts from an electric button under my foot, but you'll have to turn it off by hand. Then go get the doctor and the coroner."

Jameson shut off the graphophone.

There was silence in the room. Halsey looked up from his dripping hand, glancing from his lieutenant who had quietly slipped down fainting upon the floor to his dead man lying across the sunlit doorway.

Then he looked at Herrick and apparently for the first time really saw him.

"If I'd known it was you on this job, Taylor," he said, "I'd brought artillery."

"Taylor?" said Jameson. "Not ——"

"D'ye ever hear of him?" sneered the hurt bandit. "I s'pose you never heard of Taylor."

"Did I ever hear of him?" exclaimed Jameson. "Well, I should say!"

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UNDER the SKIN

by GEORGE L. CATTON

Author of "The Years Between."

THE law was law to Harris.

Six feet two inches of forty-year-old bone, muscle, and sinew, guided and directed by a domineering mind that had absorbed great quantities of Blackstone in its college years, Harris had no patience with those who failed to keep the laws intact. Circumstances, no matter to what extent extenuating, never altered cases; a weakling was a weed—to be kept down.

And even in those odd corners of the earth's wilds where prehistoric convulsions have turned up a few meager deposits of man's coveted metals, and where men maintain that civilized laws are, of a necessity, unconstitutional, he still respected those laws, laid them down to his fellows, and insisted on their obedience—to the very letter of them.

Nor had Harris any frivolities of character to cater to. Hard as a hangman and as cold-blooded as an embalmer, his temper, if he had one, was not to be aroused by human efforts. The alluring weaker sex he smiled on in public, because they smiled on him, and in private sneered at for their very weakness.

The day he left college we seriously predicted, keen, quick-witted, commanding, that nothing but his own virile will stood between him and the presidency. We gave him five years to reach the state governor's chair; two years more to find a seat in the—but what's the use of that now? Instead, he shed his civilized clothes, notified his bankers of an indefinite absence, and turned his face to the north.

The wanderlust was rank in his blood. A starched collar galled his throat. The free winds of the unconquered places called to him. And law, unrelenting, merciless law; law with a powerful right arm and an unconquerable will went into the graveyard above the fifty-third. And immediately things began to happen to him.

Three months after Harris left the boat at Juneau he came out on a stretcher with a hole in his lungs and lay for five weeks in a hospital in Victoria.

A year later, Cuffan, of the N. W. M. P., brought Harris into Dawson with four fingers missing from his right hand and a knife-wound in his hip. That same Summer he gave himself up at Fairbanks for killing a negro who had tried to jump his claim—known later as the "Green Dome on the 60 Mile"—and incidentally had two slugs dug out of his leg.

Law was law to Harris. Just to satisfy him they impaneled a jury and acquitted him. Then he imported a high-priced mineralogist as a manager for the Green Dome in his absence. Two months later he dropped in at night—"to look around." The mineralogist did a year government time.

In six years Harris had killed nine men in self-defense; had taken four others "outside" in irons, charged with serious crimes; had accumulated more scars than a professional duelist; but hadn't learned a thing. The law was law. Alaska was as much a part of his native country as Ohio, his natal state, and therefore came within the jurisdiction of that country's laws.

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Nearly everybody from Old Crow to Skagway and west to Nome knew him, and those who didn't, wanted to, so they could keep out of his way. There were two who swore openly to get him, and then slipped over into Canada when they heard he was looking for them.

He spent the Winters at the Green Dome, but it was quite possible to meet him unexpectedly anywhere in the Summer.

HE HAD been up there ten years when I ran into him in Ogilvie. I knew him in spite of his heavy mustache and the big blue scar across his nose.

"Harris, of '01?" I greeted, meeting his hand and giving him the distress signal of our old frat.

He grabbed me by the arm and swung me around, took one sweeping glance at my ragged clothes and sneered.

"Up against it!" he drawled, nodding his head sarcastically. "Always knew you wouldn't amount to much—too fond of the other sex!"

I backed away a pace, a retort springing to my tongue, but I didn't mouth it. I had to acknowledge to myself that he had spoken only the truth; I was seriously up against it. He pulled out his pipe and began to fill it leisurely, and I had an opportunity to look him over.

Never burdened with much superfluous flesh, he had thinned down till he reminded me of a greyhound. His crisp, short hair, always so very black, was streaked now with gray above his ears, and his front teeth were broken and yellow. They were the same old hard features, except that his occasional smile had set itself into an habitual sneer, which, with the blue scar across his nose, made his face repulsive in repose.

He was in the pink of his prime, and I understood as I watched him tamp the tobacco down with the thumb of his fingerless hand, why he was so generally feared by the lawless element. A man like him, when he knew he was right, would face a Georgia mob. He squeezed the match out in the palm of his hand and looked me over again.

"They can use a few more shovel-stiffs at the Green Dome on the 60 Mile." he growled. "I'm going up in the morning. Got any money?"

I acknowledged my absolute lack of that necessary element as gracefully as I could. He drove his fist down into his pocket and peeled off two one-hundred-dollar gold-certificates and held them out to me.

"Get yourself a couple of blankets and a pair of whole trousers. That's two hundred at ten for six months." and he was gone.

I looked at the money—more than I had seen for three months—and above my first impression, repulsion, rose up the old admiration the class of '01 had held for him. There wasn't another acquaintance in the world who would have trusted me with two hundred cents. Then, too, he had offered me a job in his employ—manual labor that I was not accustomed to, it was true—but I was more than willing to step down to pick-and-shovel work to get "outside."

The stories I had heard of him since I came in faded out in the light of his generosity. I wasn't at all annoyed the next morning when he looked me over with those sneering, critical eyes again.

"What's the rate of pay up there?" I ventured to ask as he climbed into the canoe.

He slipped his lonely thumb into the strap he had tacked to the top of the paddle so that he could use his crippled hand, and drove deep into the swirling water.

"Beggars shouldn't be too inquisitive!" he snapped. "You'll get all you're worth!"

That silenced me. Not that I resented the accusation—I had drifted to too low a level to resent a personal truth from him again—but I found it impossible to talk to such a man, with him behind me where I couldn't see his face, and we paddled all morning without a word passing between us.

Hour after hour we drove up through great gorges split up with the frost and tumbled down in careless heaps. Past brush-grown stretches of bank where blackened stumps told of momentary camps of men going up, some of whom had never come down again. Along red sand strips dotted here and there with the rotting frames of rockers, and a mound or two of stones boasting no epitaphs. Hour after hour against the current, and neither of us spoke.

Often I imagined I could feel his gray eyes boring into my back; if it hadn't been for that and his regular driving paddle I would not have known he was in the canoe.

We had covered about half the distance when——

I remember I had eased up a little in my pace, not being accustomed to continuous paddling, and was feeling the canoe with my

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knees to see if he would understand and accept the intimation, when loud and startling from around the bend before us came two revolver shots.

I trailed my paddle, listening. Then I nearly went over backwards as he drove his paddle deep and nearly lifted the canoe out of the water. I had to drive hard to keep pace with that human screw behind me. We were going like a launch when we rounded the bend.

I heard his paddle strike a thwart when he dropped it. The short roar of his automatic almost deafened me. I swept the right bank with one swift glance.

Up among the rocks a man leaped to his feet, shot one glance at us and headed downstream, ducking from side to side to dodge another bullet. He had recognized Harris. I clapped my hands over my ears, but Harris let him go.

A little way farther up the hill another man stepped from behind a boulder and started down toward us, his gun hanging suggestively in his hand. We swung into the bank and waited.

Tall he was, almost as tall as Harris, and very emaciated. I looked up into his big shiny eyes, noted the high color in his wasted cheeks, and the brown spots on his shirt-front, listened to the deep hacking cough, and gave him six months to live. My little sister died of consumption.

Harris stepped out on to the bank and faced him.

"What are you two fellows blazing away at each other like this for?" he demanded sarcastically. "Don't you know that murder is a hanging matter in these United States?"

The consumptive held his hand over his mouth a moment to try and check the coughing the excitement had brought on, and waited till he could get control of his voice, then:

"He tried to jump my claim!" he gasped. "I caught him pulling stakes!"

Harris whirled around and looked downstream, but the other man had got out of sight. He shoved his gun back into its holster and faced the sick man again.

"Your claim!" he rasped, accenting the personal pronoun. "Then you're Fellows?"

The sick man nodded his head.

"Arthur Fellows," he husked, and the tone of his voice told me that the last stage of the disease had brought an unconquerable weakness; that the burden of just hanging on was getting too heavy to bear.

Harris looked him over from head to foot, his repulsive face hellish with that sneer of hatred for debility. He pointed to the brown spots on Fellows's shirt-front.

"You've got it bad!" he snapped heartlessly. "Why don't you get out—say California, or Texas?"

Fellows shook his head and I saw his lip tremble.

"Too late now!" he whispered hoarsely, tapping his flat chest. "They're leaking like a rusty kettle, and besides—" he turned his big moist eyes down-stream to where the river turned south toward the "outside," and swallowed hard—"I haven't enough for her."

HARRIS climbed back into the canoe without another word. For him to see a man on the edge of tears was disgusting enough, but to hear a man use a tone that he disliked even in a woman's voice sickened him.

I straightened up and we shot out into the river. A minute later I turned my head and looked back over my shoulder. Fellows was standing where we had left him so unceremoniously, looking down-stream to where it turned south toward the "outside," and I wondered who "her" could be—wife, mother, sister, or sweetheart? Harris grunted.

"A lunger!" he snorted. "The disease is contagious. He ought to be isolated! He's been working there for two years on a stringer that won't pay his way out."

"Ought to be isolated!" I resented that. There wasn't another claim working between Oglivie and the Green Dome. Fellows didn't see a human being from week's end to week's end. And that sneer of Harris's!

"But he's working for a woman!" I expostulated. "Who knows—she might be actually in need of——"

"A bit of lace for her pearly throat, or a gewgaw for her whining poodle!" he interrupted me sarcastically.

"They're not all alike!" I shot back testily. "I've known a great many that——"

He cut me off again.

"That's just your trouble!" he railed. "You've known a great many *that!*"

I let the preferable silence of the first half of the journey settle down again, nor

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did we speak again till we arrived at the Green Dome about dark, where, with a wave of his hand only, he passed me over to his manager who took me up to the bunk-shack to get acquainted with the gang I was to work with. Under Harris, I expected to find myself among a callous-handed bunch of rough-necks.

There were about thirty so-called shovel-stiffs in that one shack, representing seven different dialects, and when I went in there was a small-sized riot on over the war. Still, accustomed to dealing with nearly every nationality in my two years at Ellis Island, I had no fears but that I would get along with them somehow—if I could get along with Harris.

Every day Harris would come down and stand off, always watching me, but he never came near enough to speak. I was just a shovel-stiff to him.

Then in the middle of my second month he came into the grub-shack at supper-time and held up his lonely thumb to signify that he wanted me outside. My heart was mixing with my supper when I followed him out. I didn't want to lose that five dollars a day he was paying me; it meant home for me in a year. He slammed the door shut behind me and pulled on his mitt.

"The time-clerk's croaked!" he rasped shortly. "You're the only one here with sufficient education to keep track of these 'ings' and 'skys'! Shift your blankets into the work-shack and sleep on the books!"

My hands wouldn't heal up. My back ached terribly at night. He must have seen my gratitude in my face.

"It means a hundred per cent. increase in your wages: that's why I'm giving it to you!" he sneered, turning away. "I want to get back that two hundred I loaned you!"

I moved my few personal belongings through the driving snow with an old song running through my thoughts. I could see myself going down the river on the tail of the spring flood. I would—I would stop at Fellows's claim and see if he had any letters to take out. I would . . .

I shut down then on my air-castles. I was getting acquainted with Harris.

Next morning he came over and watched me checking out the gangs; after that he never came near me. The North King blew in, dragging his roughshod feet across the buried earth, ripped away all the loose timbers and the roof of the powder-house, stopped operations for six weeks and blew out again when the northern lights began to fade. Then Ohio got to calling me. I tackled Harris.

"Going down to Oglivie myself in the morning!" he burred gruffly. "Pack up!"

THE following day when I dipped my paddle into the high water I knew better than to try to start a conversation. I had learned. Even the foreigners checking out behind us would stop their wrangling and work in sullen silence when his giant figure loomed up in their presence. And he didn't open his mouth for three hours.

When we reached Fellows's claim he swung the canoe into the bank and we climbed out.

Fellows was still there. Some of the boys had spoken to him coming up the last thing in the Fall, and we knew he wouldn't try to get out in the snow in his condition. I knew the disease. I knew the cold weather would give him a new lease of life as long as it lasted, but when the Spring came . . .

There wasn't a sign of him anywhere. We pulled the canoe up onto the bank and pounded on his door.

Down-stream where the river turned south toward the "outside," a rat left the bank and started up against the current. Harris used his foot on the bottom of the door. The rat heard it, and dove. Harris stepped back and burst in the door.

Fellows was still there. Full length on his bunk he lay with his clothes all on, and the blankets around him were wet with stains just turning brown. We were a few hours late.

Harris lifted one of the bony hands and felt for the pulse, then he dropped it.

"Burned out!" he growled callously. "The medical profession can sew up a heart and peel a kidney, but they can't find a cure for the commonest of all diseases."

He crossed the stiffening hands upon the breast and pulled a blanket over the gaunt face.

"We can't take it out, so we'll have to bury it. That's the law," he went on gruffly. "Then we've got to find anything of value he may have possessed and see that it reaches the hands of his lawful heirs, if he had any."

A feeling of repulsion for a human fellow who could think of nothing but the sordid

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realism of the law in a case as sad as that swept in upon me, and I turned away to help him search the room.

Over in the corner under the wood-pile we found three little home-made cotton sacks, nearly full. Harris weighed them in his hands and took a handful out into the sunlight.

"Half pyrites!" he snorted sarcastically. "Two years' grubbing for fool's gold!"

He stopped to make a mental calculation and to estimate their weight again.

"He's got about five thousand in pay dirt! Humph! it would have paid him better to have gone to California and made a fight for his life!"

Fellows' gaunt face and his quivering lip as I had seen them that day when we first met him sprang into my memory. I looked up at Harris, at that repulsive, sneering face of his, and deep down in my chest something stirred.

"But he was working for a——"

Then I remembered and stopped short. He laughed, a little sarcastic laugh.

"For a rag and a bone and a hank of hair!" he sneered. "Or an ostrich feather, French heels, and a stick of rouge. Take your choice!"

I shut up once more. There's no satisfaction in arguing with a man that talks with the conviction of ignorance. We continued our search of the shack in silence.

Fellows had never received any letters, or if he had he had destroyed them. We failed to find even a newspaper that would have given us his home address. We dug a shallow hole in the sand down where the river turned south toward the "outside," and Harris lifted the body off the bunk. A note-book fell out of the blankets, and I stooped and picked it up.

Fellows had been writing when he died and had rolled on the book in his last struggles. Harris laid the body back, and we went outside.

Realizing that he had no papers in his possession that would give his home address to the finders of the three little bags—and he knew that they would be found some day—he had tried to leave a message in his last few living moments. All he had succeeded in doing was an almost meaningless scrawl.

"There's two—" he had started to write, and I imagined I could see him waiting till he could master the cough and get his hand steady again.

"But I want it all to go to—" he had tried again, and there was a splash of brown spots.

Then lower down in a straggly scrawl that ran off the edge of the page he had spent his last conscious moment in a supreme effort:

"To go to—to——"

Then he had passed over.

Harris growled:

"That's the worst habit a man can have, putting off vital tasks till the last possible second. He says there's two! Two what?"

I turned away so that he would not see the uncontrollable disgust on my face, and back in my mind's eye I could see Fellows's face when he said— "I haven't enough for her."

"Two what?" Harris repeated, and I detected a note of exasperation in his voice. "Two sisters, a mother and a sister, a wife and a mother, a wife and a sister, or what?"

He ran rapidly over the rest of the note-book, but that page was the only one that had a mark on it. Then on the inside of the back cover he found this entry:

MRS ARTHUR FELLOWS,
110 Latimore Avenue,
Chicago, Ill.

MRS. ARTHUR FELLOWS,
Huntsville, Muskoka,
Ontario, Canada.

"Two wives!" Harris snarled. "The fool was a bigamist!"

I took the note-book out of his hand and searched it carefully. I didn't like to believe that of Fellows. He hadn't looked to me like a man that would do anything crooked. But the rest of the book was blank. Harris got up and started into the shack.

"Found the first one didn't suit him, so he married another—that is if he really did marry her; the chances are he didn't need to—and to blazes with the country's laws!" And he lifted the body off the bunk again. "That means that we have got to find out which was his first and legal wife, and take her that five thousand dollars."

"But he writes here that he wants it all to go to—it might be the second wife?" I suggested; it looked that way to me.

Harris balanced the body across his shoulder and started for the door.

"He didn't sign that, so it's not a will," he explained shortly. "And in any case

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his legal wife is entitled to a third. Besides—" he stopped outside the door and turned around, and I threw up my hand to keep Fellows' head from striking the edge of the door—"he didn't have any respect for his country's laws, so he is out of consideration!"

We piled a mound of stones on the top of the grave and got back into our canoe, and as we rounded the bend where the river turned south toward the "outside," I took off my hat. I waited, expecting Harris to say something about that too, but he remained silent and kept paddling. Nor did he speak again all the way down.

At Oglivie we reported Fellows' death and cashed the three little bags. Harris' estimate was correct; we received just five thousand dollars for Fellows' two years' grubbing.

A MONTH later I started to bid Harris good-by, in Seattle, but he wouldn't have it.

"I'm paying you your wages and all your expenses while you are with me!" he rasped testily. "You are still working for me! And as you are working by the month, I demand a legal month's notice!"

I was curious to see the "her" that Fellows had been grubbing his life away for. Then, too, I wanted to see Harris handle the case, I had an idea that I would be able to prove to him that his views on the "her" question were badly distorted. The following Monday we stepped out of a taxi in Latimore Avenue, Chicago, and found Number 110.

"Brownstone front, polished bronze knocker, white-gravel drive!" Harris snorted. "The usual domicile of the ultra useless female!"

He led the way up the steps and used the knocker as if he had his foot on Fellows' shack-door. The maid in slavish black and white swung it open.

"Is Mrs. Fellows at home?" and Harris palmed our cards so she wouldn't see them.

The maid found us seats on the veranda and went in "to see." In a few moments she was back with the information that madam would see no one; that we must call again on the morrow at three P. M.

Harris smiled grimly. He peeled off a five-dollar bill and gave it to the maid.

"You go back and tell madam that the law never puts off till tomorrow what must be done today."

She came back again directly, all trained smiles, and taking our cards led us in.

Mrs. Fellows met us with a cold, stern frown. When I saw her face I knew that Harris had scored the first point in our "her" argument, and settled in my mind for all time that it had not been this "her" that Fellows had meant in his last message.

Tall and lank—not thin—and chilling in her staid defiance, she was a fit inhabitant of that rigidly furnished house. I studied her profile as she faced Harris, and bet myself a new hat that there were no children in that home; a mouth like that was never meant to be kissed. Then when she opened that mouth I glanced at Harris and marveled that nature could be so unjust to herself as to shape two such granite profiles.

"Why this unconventional intrusion, gentlemen?" she demanded sternly. "It must be pressing business indeed that is responsible for your unseemly conduct!"

Harris took out his fountain-pen, slowly and in silence, and removing the cap slipped it over the other end. Then he brought out a note-book, spread it open upon his knee, and looked her full in her angry eyes.

"Your husband is dead!" he coldly informed her. "And as his attorney I am settling up his estate."

Watching her closely I fancied I caught just the faintest shadow of a smile crossing her face, but she raised her handkerchief to her eyes in the conventional attitude of grief. Harris' wide nostrils curled slightly.

"When were you and Arthur Fellows married?" he asked, poising the pen.

She lowered her handkerchief and answered coldly—

"Seven years the first of last August."

"And this property?" Harris waved his pen to designate the residence.

She stiffened up and frowned slightly.

"Is his!"

"Is there any more to his estate? And in what circumstances did he leave you? Did he get a divorce?"

She resented that. I saw it in the slight toss of her head and the gleam in her eyes. She touched the bell on the table, and the maid stood in the doorway.

"For further information I must refer you to my attorney," she drawled evenly, and picked a card out of the tray beside her. "Maud, show the gentlemen out!"

Harris took the card and followed me into the street.

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"A rag and a bone and a hank of hair!"

It was my turn to sneer. He stepped into the taxi and pulled the door shut behind him.

"No!" he snapped. "A very sensible woman! Fellows was a fool!"

I let the old silence settle down again; he and I would never agree on that subject.

We called next on the firm of attorneys whose card she had given us, and found to our mutual astonishment that Fellows was worth just short of a million dollars, in cold cash and cast-iron securities in the bank. The junior partner placed his feet up on the top of the desk and leaned back in his chair.

"He used to be worth that," he corrected himself, "but about five years ago he came in here when I was alone in the office, and his face was very serious—which was rather unusual for him, being one of those 'I should worry' sort of men—and sat himself down right there.

"Says he, 'I want every cent I own made over to my wife in such a manner that I can't touch it.'

"It wasn't up to me to ask any questions, so I didn't. He knew his own business best. When he went out he was as flat broke as a tout—as far as his personal ability to draw his money was concerned. After that I didn't see him again for three years."

"He didn't try to get a divorce, then?" Harris questioned.

The junior partner smiled and shook his head.

"He'd have an awful time getting a divorce from——"

The junior partner stopped and colored up; then he tried again.

"She would never have given him grounds for a divorce," he finished.

"And the next time you saw him?" I asked.

The junior partner scratched his head.

"Two years ago he came in here looking pretty sick and needy, and called me out into the outer office there.

"'Would it be possible to draw five thousand dollars without my wife ever knowing it?'" he asked.

"I hesitated a moment to recall the transfer, then, 'No!' says I. 'But what difference does it make if she does know?'

"'All the difference in the world!' he flares up, and without another word out he goes. I watched him out of the window going down the street, and he walked with his shoulders all hunched up like an old man. There's something queer about that fellow," he concluded.

When we had reached the street I stopped and faced Harris.

"And he spent the last two years grubbing out a paltry five thousand!" I ejaculated wonderingly.

Harris tapped his head suggestively.

"Just plain crazy!" he snapped. "Now we'll see what fool would marry a crazy man—if she really did marry him. We'll go to Canada."

BACK among a cluster of beech and maple on the shore of the lake at Huntsville, Muskoka, we found the residence pointed out to us as that of Arthur Fellows. A little Scots woman opened the door at our knock and held up a warning finger to her lips.

"Not too loud, gentlemen!" she cautioned in a whisper. "My daughter is asleep."

Harris took off his hat. I had been carrying mine since we left the road.

"Is this where Mrs. Arthur Fellows lives?" he inquired gruffly.

Then from inside came a low, sad voice.

"Ask them to come in, mother?" it said. "Maybe they have news of Arthur."

The little Scots woman opened the door wide, and I glanced at Harris's face as he passed in. Somehow it seemed very out of place in that peaceful frame. Then as I followed him in I caught sight of "Her."

Propped up in an invalid's chair she sat, her wan sweet face framed against the lake outside the window, her big deep eyes flitting from Harris to me and back to Harris with a tremendous question in their great depths.

I put out my hand implusively to stop Harris. He was the last man in the world to impart the information he had brought to her. But a merciful Providence was ahead of me.

Call it woman's intuition if you will, or maybe she read our message in our faces. Perhaps it was expected. I saw her hands clench white to the finger-nails. Her bloodless lips met in one pitiful line. She met Harris's cold, hard eyes with a little cry of heart-breaking anguish.

"He's gone!" she gasped. "Arthur's gone!"

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Her mother put her arm around her and buried that ghostly stricken face on her breast, cooing softly to her through her own streaming tears.

I avoided Harris's face as we took the chairs the little mother had placed for us. Deliberately I turned my back on that merciless devil and looked out of the window.

Out in the lake a hundred yards from the shore a tiny bungalow in the course of construction stood upon an island, its white beams and rafters standing out against the dark green pines around it. Just below us at the water's edge lay a canoe, bottom-up on the sand, with a tiny path running down to it. A chipmunk frisked playfully across the top of a stump outside the window. Harris coughed shortly.

Then I took things into my own hands.

Not caring one atom for what Harris would think or say, I spoke up. It had to be done.

In as few words as I could tell it, I told that stricken little woman and that little mother how Fellows had died. Told them that he had passed out without a struggle of pain, in a nice clean white bed, with a good doctor and a professional nurse in attendance. Told them that his last word had been for them, and that some day he would meet them beyond. Told it all. All that my imagination would supply to make it easier for them I gave it tongue, till my own eyes got misty and I couldn't control my voice.

But I didn't say a word about the note-book and the message he had tried to write, or that he had said there were two. I didn't mention the five thousand dollars—Harris had that, and I knew Harris. And when I had finished I looked at the wan white face that lifted itself out of its mother's breast, and down in my heart I was very glad that I had remembered all those old trite ways of breaking gently such news. I was very glad that I had gone to Alaska, and come back with Harris.

I turned to him with my face trying to break out in a frown of, "Now do your worst!" But he ignored me. He took out that business pen of his and spread his note-book on his knee.

"Mrs. Fellows," he demanded gruffly, "just what was Arthur Fellows to you?"

I started to get to my feet. He was half as big again as I was, but that never occurred to me in my rage at his sheer brutality. Then I sat down again. I could see by her face that to her there was nothing out of the ordinary in that question. Her little mouth almost smiled.

"Everything!" she whispered. "Arthur was my husband, my playmate, my all! Arthur was my boy!"

Harris made a note in his book and looked up again.

"When were you and Arthur Fellows married?" was his next question.

She turned her face to the open window, and the chipmunk on the stump sat up and eyed her saucily.

"Four years ago this Spring," she whispered.

"And did you know when you married him that——"

I cut him off right there.

"That he had consumption?" I finished his question.

Then I reached back to my hip, a move he knew very well, that he could not mistake. I'd stop that hellish cruelty if I had to!

But it was she who stopped him.

"Please?" she moaned. "Please go away now? Can't you see that I can not stand any more? Don't you understand? Arthur's gone! God in Heaven! Arthur's gone!"

The little mother stepped in front of us and faced Harris sternly.

"Please go?" she pleaded. "I'll come outside and answer your questions."

I stopped at the door as I followed them out and turned my head. She was staring out the window at the half-built cottage on the island, and in my mind's eye a picture flashed. A picture of Fellows standing on the bank of the 60-Mile in Alaska, looking down-stream to where the river turned south toward the "outside." I closed the door behind me.

A few yards from the house, where she could watch the wan face at the window, the little mother stopped and gave Harris back his card.

"Mr. Harris," she said gently, "you asked her what Arthur was to her, and she said 'Everything.' Somehow I don't think you realize what that everything means."

She turned and pointed to the unfinished bungalow on the island.

"Do you see that little cottage out there, Mr. Harris? Arthur was building that when

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her trouble came—building it for her and him. They came up here on their honeymoon, Mr. Harris, and fell in love with the natural beauty you see around you. They decided to stay. Arthur secured a good clerical position in the railroad offices, and bought that little island. Every night when he came home, he would take her over in the canoe to watch him build with his own hands their 'little dream home.' They would not allow other feet but theirs to step upon that island. Even I, Mr. Harris, have never been over there. Then when it was about half-built as you see it now, I received a letter from him, asking me to come and take care of her. The doctors said she had tuberculosis."

The little mother glanced up at the thin white arm on the window-sill, and her drawn, wrinkled face reminded me of my own mother's face when my little sister died.

"Mr. Harris," she went on, lowering her voice, "when I stepped off the train here and met Arthur, I was afraid for him. He was like a crazy man.

" 'Mother!' he gasped, grabbing me by the two shoulders. 'For God's sake, mother, help me save her! Don't let her get away from us!'

"We did all we could, Mr. Harris. We sat her there by the open window to take the rest cure. We studied the disease and the scores of advertised cures. We inquired of all the sanatoriums, and had a different specialist down here every month. We wrote all over the world—to Switzerland and Germany, and spent every cent he could earn trying to find a cure.

"And every day Arthur would come home for his dinner instead of taking it with him as before, just to be with her for the fifteen minutes between the two long walks. At night he would read and talk and sing to her, to keep her mind off her trouble. He dropped his tools over there on the island and left the little dream home just as you see it now. Every minute he could be away from his work he spent with her. But it was all no use. She never seemed to be getting any better.

"Then we heard of a sanatorium in California that boasted a big percentage of cures. He sent away for their prospectus and figured up the cost. He called me out here where she couldn't hear us.

" 'It will take five thousand dollars to send her there for the two years they want to cure her.' he told me. 'I'm going to Chicago tonight to try and get the money.'

"But he didn't get it, Mr. Harris. In a week he was back, and I knew by his face he had failed. Yet he wouldn't let her see his face without its accustomed smile. Then about a week after he got back from Chicago the specialist came down. When he had gone I found Arthur down there by the lake, and I will never forget the awful look in his eyes.

" 'Mother!' he moaned. 'Promise me you will take care of her when I am gone? The doctor says I've got it too!' "

The little mother stopped, and her wet eyes traveled down the tiny path to the water.

"Look, Mr. Harris!" she pointed. "He turned their canoe over that night, as you see it now, and no one will right it while I am alive."

Harris picked up his hat and killed a spider that had crawled up on the crown, then he laid it down again.

"What did he want to go to Alaska for?" he snapped. "Alaska, of all places, when he knew he had consumption!"

She glanced up at him with a big surprised look in her face.

"For that five thousand!" she answered.

Then the wan white face appeared at the window and the low voice called, "Mother?"

The little mother bowed.

"I must leave you for a moment, gentlemen," she said. "I'll be back directly."

I saw my opportunity. I took advantage of it.

"With your permission we will go now, and call again tomorrow?" I suggested. "Maybe Mrs. Fellows will feel like talking to us herself then."

Harris didn't like that; I knew he wouldn't. But as the little mother approved, and he had to submit, I had gained my point. I had taken him away without that stricken woman knowing what he had come to tell her.

In the fifteen minutes' walk back to the hotel neither of us spoke. I wasn't expecting Harris to say anything, he was too angry with me for what he would have termed my interference with his business, and I—well if I had opened my mouth I would have cursed him. For the first time in my life I envied the physical bigness of him. I would have given every cent I possessed to be able to smash in that sneering face, with

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hard driving swings of a strong right arm.

But as it was I had to content myself with trying to think up a plan to keep him from going down there on the morrow. If he went down there the next day and told that sick little woman that Fellows had not been her husband, that he had had a legal wife living when he married her! If Harris dared to start down there tomorrow!

I couldn't eat my supper with my rage at my failure to devise a plan to keep him away. I got up from the table and took a long walk.

FOR three unproductive hours I planned and schemed. Then I shut my teeth down hard and turned back to the hotel. There was a forty-four automatic in my bag upstairs. As a last persuasion I . . .

The clerk handed me my key and reached into the mail rack behind him.

"Mr. Harris checked out for that last train," he informed me politely. "He left these for me to give to you."

He handed me three letters.

"Gone?" I could hardly believe my ears. "Gone!"

Then—then I bought a dollar's worth of the best cigars in the house and gave them to the clerk. Harris wouldn't go down there on the morrow, after all!

I ran up to my room, my elated mind busy with probabilities. Harris had gone to Chicago to take Fellows' five thousand dollars to that austere icicle on Latimore Avenue—it would buy her "a bit of lace for her pearly throat." Down in the little cottage by the lake it would save a life, yet I was very glad that he had gone.

Five thousand wouldn't have begun to pay for the damage he'd have done with his mouth. It is what we know, after all, that hurts us the most.

I ripped the end off one of the letters and drew out a check and a letter addressed to me.

Enclosed find back wages and enough expense money to take you back to Ohio. Since you have had the bad manners to interfere in my business, I am leaving you to finish it. Should you ever come to Alaska again, call on me. I will try to find you a pick-and-shovel job.

I crumpled the letter up in my hand and threw it on the floor. If ever I went to Alaska again, which was extremely unlikely, I told myself, I'll—I'll——

Then I remembered his superior size. I opened the second envelope.

It, too, contained a check and a letter. I picked up the check and found to my astonishment that it was made out for only four thousand one hundred and fifty-six dollars and twenty-seven cents! It had been drawn on a Chicago bank and made payable to Fellows' first wife, through the firm of attorneys we had called on. But Fellows' three little bags had brought five thousand? I picked up the letter. It ran:

Mrs. Arthur Fellows, Dear Madam:

In compliance with the last will and testament of your late husband, deceased, I have this day deposited in the First National Bank the sum of four thousand one hundred and fifty-six dollars and twenty-seven cents. Said sum constituting his entire estate at the time of his death—less our fee.

Yours, etc.,
W. Harris,
Attorney.

Less our fee? He wasn't satisfied with exacting all the law's demands, but he, too, must have his pound of flesh.

"'If ever I go to Alaska—'" I was talking to myself again—"If ever I go to Alaska again, I'll take an automatic with a hair trigger!"

I threw down the letter and opened the third envelope. There was a letter in it, too, addressed to that little woman in the cottage by the lake, and I was half afraid to read it for fear it contained all I had worked so hard to keep him from telling her that afternoon. I read:

Dear Mrs. Fellows:

I am enclosing herewith check for the full amount received for your late husband's claim in Alaska.

With hearty wishes for your early and complete recovery, I am,

Very sincerely yours,
William B. Harris,
Ogilvie, Yukon.

I threw down the letter and grabbed up the check, a turmoil of conflicting ideas running through my thoughts. What did Harris mean? The one line on the check, that one line that interests all of us, caught my eye. I gasped—

"Pay to the order of Mrs. Arthur Fellows the sum of fifty-five thousand dollars!"

The check slipped out of my hand. For a long while I sat there motionless. Then I stooped down and picked up Harris' letter to me. I straightened it out and folded it into my pocketbook. After all I was just a—a—a shovel-stiff.

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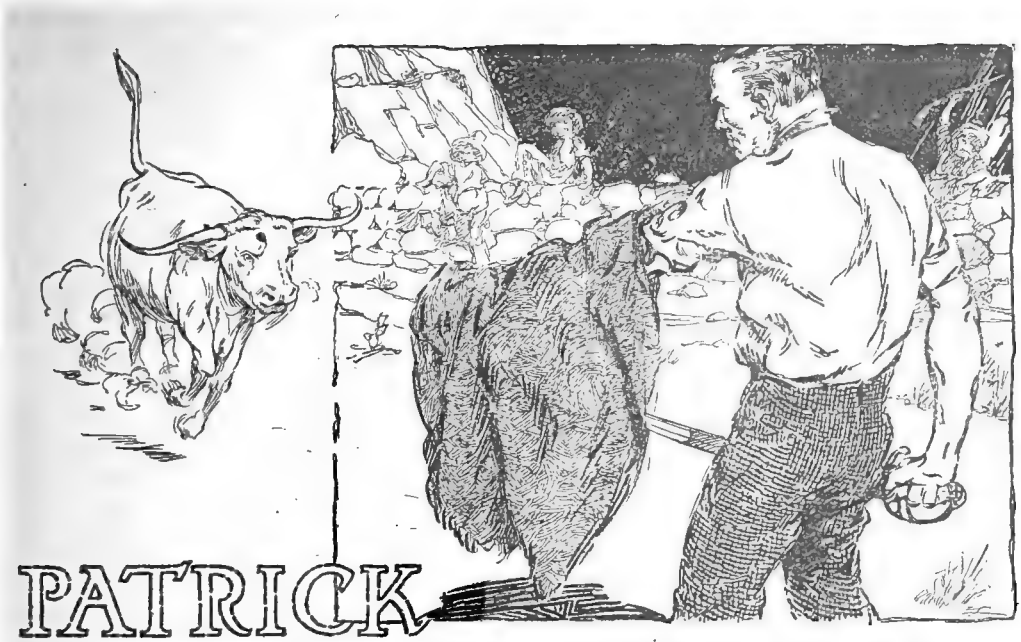

PATRICK PEGAN KELLY: HEAD HUNTER

by HAYS BELL

I REMEMBER well how, long years ago, when I was but a wee boy, my father took me to hear some sort of Civil War lecture. It was mostly dull and uninteresting to me. Even the appearance of the speaker I remember but dimly. But he told the story of a great battle. There was a little weazened man with a gray goatee, mounted on a big black horse, who led a charge with a handful of men against an almost impregnable position—a desperate last chance which cost the life of every man in the charge, including the little weazened leader, but which won the battle.

"There was a hero!" exclaimed the speaker.

At that time I did not know what hero meant. I recollect looking at my father for a cue to decide whether the speaker was approving or condemning the little man's conduct.

But for years afterward, when I thought or heard the word "hero," there came to my mind the picture of a little, weazened man with a white goatee, riding a great black horse, leading a forlorn charge in battle.

But I later learned that there are heroes and heroes.

It was Patrick Pegan Kelly who finally upset my childhood conception, broke my boyish image. Now, when I think of a hero, I see a man, huge, strong and unafraid, standing near one side of a stone corral in the Guerrero wilderness, a red blanket in his left hand, a rusty sword in his right, calmly waiting. Charging down on him is wide-horned death itself in the shape of an enraged bull, stung to desperation by the sword-pricks of his persecutors, eyes gleaming red, mouth foam-flecked, with lowered head, bent on avenging his every wrong on this mere man-thing who dared defy him.

If individual morals depend to an extent on geography and latitude, those of governments can not be otherwise, since individuals are but government atoms.

So any number of things inconceivable on Broadway or State Street, may be quite the thing in Hongkong or Hamburg or Mexico. Ten wedded wives may be the rule with "our set" in Utah, fifty in Constantinople, one in Cincinnati, and none at all in

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Campeche. Down in Washington, if you wish to encompass the political downfall of a hated rival, you do not slip a knife carefully between his ribs, nor even hire men to do it for you. Our civilization has taught us other and better ways—the cruder methods are no longer in vogue. But should one happen to be striving for political ends in some of the other latitudes and longitudes previously mentioned, it were well to conform to local practise and adopt local morals if one would court success.

The ebony ruler of Timbuctoo was not chosen at the primaries, nor did the king of the Cannibal Isles keep his throne by turning the other cheek. It simply was not done there. But let me tell you the story as it happened.

WHEN the two men burst into my private office I frowned.

"I'm distinctly not in to either of you," was my emphatic remark.

But they only laughed at me.

"Don't bother to offer us chairs," said the big one. "I talk better standing, anyhow."

Then, without giving me more opportunity to object, he launched into his story which ended with these words:

"You see, all you have to do to earn the ten thousand bones, is to get us a job down on Don Pablo Martínez's sugar *hacienda* in Morelos. We'll do the rest. You might slip us a few letters to other Mexican *hacendados* down there, too, in case we get fired—we're not such bang-up sugar men but what Don Pablo might kick us out before we are ready. Then, when we get back from this little pink-tea affair and deliver the gent's sky-piece, you get the ten thou' right in a bunch—just like that. Easy, ain't it?"

The big one finished and sat down, wiping the perspiration from a rather dirty face with a big bandanna.

Now, to me, a perfectly respectable sugar-buyer in the capital of the Mexican Republic, this proposition was rather a stunner. Two years of revolution with its accompanying army of American bums, had brought me many weird visitors and many rare experiences, but very little solid satisfaction. I'd been offered hundreds of sure things—mines, concessions, ways to beat the unbeatable lottery, opportunities to get in on the ground floor of half a dozen revolutions; in fact, a multitude of schemes to help the other fellow play his game, but I'd discovered that there was always a stinger, visible or hidden, for me.

This strange case on the surface, however, looked different. But perhaps the stinger was only better hidden.

When my two strange visitors had broken in on me, pushing past a perfectly scandalized Mexican *mozo* who tried to explain to them that they must first be announced "to discover if *el señor* is present," I had decided to give each a *peso* for his impudence. But a second glance at the big sandy-haired one changed my mind. I decided to hear them. There was something in the big one's eyes and manner that denoted purpose.

Six-feet-four he stood, and so wide—not broad, wide—that he came through the door sideways. From his rolling gait and the tan on his face, he might have just stepped off the range at San Angelo, Texas. Unconsciously my eyes sought the chaps and spurs. Two hundred and thirty would have been his weight, I should guess, and there was not a pound of fat in it. Those gray, half-closed eyes — the real prairie squint—looked me full in the face while he talked; and when he had finished, I would almost have believed the scheme possible, were it not for two things: the utter absurdity of it, and his partner.

You see, I knew his partner. He was a bum I'd seen on the streets of Mexico City for six months, who had "touched" me repeatedly. He had been jailed for drunkenness and "rough-housing" in saloons—the real type of American bum we get in the tropics.

He was under the ordinary, both in size and appearance, and had worked as a conductor on the old Central railroad before the American railroad men had struck and mostly left the country. Since then, he had gradually drifted from bad to worse. Pinky McGinnity they called him—it might have been his name—and that was the first notice I'd received that he was out of jail.

To get another space to collect my thoughts I mentioned this.

"Now, bo, cut out the compliments," said Mr. Pinky. "I've been in, and I'm out, and we'll let it go at that. Me an' me pal here, Mr. Patrick Pegan Kelly, are out to make good, and it's up to you as a good American to help us out. If we get this

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what we are going after, we win, and you get the ten thousand. That leaves us ninety thousand to divide, and with that trifle we can struggle along. But if we don't, we lose.

"You doan' risk nothin'. Heads you win, tails we lose—see? Nobody knows you're in on it. We wouldn't be here slipping you any of this prospective kale, but we need those letters. So you just hand them to us to get us out of town—you know you don't want us around much, anyhow. I believe you have told me that several times yourself, already. No; but we don't mind taking chances," he added as he saw me ready with an objection. "We're from the place where they take chances, and the exchequer right now demands urgent measures. One big scalp will dangle from our totem-pole when we get back, or we won't get back at all. You're safe either way, pal. Eh, Pat?" as he turned to his partner.

"And we're your one best bet, too, old sport," replied the big one, Mr. Patrick Pegan Kelly. "We know we're playing a ten-to-one shot, but think what winning means: for us a fortune; for you the ten thousand simoleons, and ten times as much sugar out of Morelos every year as you are getting now, just as soon as the bandits go."

The sheer audacity of the scheme took my breath. From the above related conversation of my weird callers you have the plan but incompletely.

They declared they had unofficial offers from people high in power in the then Mexican government, of one hundred thousand *pesos* for the head of Zárate, the terrible political bandit, who had for years ravaged and despoiled the beautiful state of Morelos, laughing at the puny attempts of the government troops to overtake him, as he slipped back into his mountain fastnesses after each successful foray.

It was publicly known that the government was at its wits' end to devise a means to stop this brigandage and kill or capture the leader Zárate. If he continued at large, the government would be compelled to maintain guards by thousands throughout the state, thus depleting the already meager army and making possible new revolutions in other unprotected states.

So their story of the reward was not at all improbable. But to accomplish what they intended, to get the head of Zárate and deliver it—the little head-hunting expedition, as they were pleased to style it—was a wild dream of two broke and daring adventurers. Whole armies for more than two years had been trying it, and always unsuccessfully. What chance then, had these two lone Americans?

"It's suicide—certain death!" I blurted out as the manifold risks presented themselves in my mind. "Stop it and try something that will provide a stake for the trip back to the States, is my advice. Now, I know they want some good, strong men down at the gas-works."

But I could proceed no farther.

"Forget it, pal," broke in Kelly. "We've been up against that gas-work game at various times, and it's lost its appeal. We came here for help in our scheme. It'll cost you a sheet of paper and five minutes' time. Do we get it or don't we?"

He stood up to go. It was no use of course, to argue further with them.

"Don't blame it on me, boys," I said as I reached for a pen. "I'd slip you a dollar each now to go out and buy your own flowers, but I'm afraid you would never get past the first *cantina* with it. But if you do use this letter, you will go to your funeral unmourned and unsung, as far as I am concerned. Now, remember this: You came to me for a letter of recommendation to Don Pablo Martínez. You say you are good sugar men. I take you at your word. I don't know of any other mission you may have in the State of Morelos.

"Keep your ten thousand *pesos*. You will earn the whole reward if you make good. But I advise you to pawn your pistols and your 30-30's and take a chance on that two hundred thousand drawing in the National lottery for the 5th of May, if you want a run for your money. I heard of a man who won there once, years ago."

Then I proceeded to write Don Pablo Martínez, in my very best Spanish, that Señor Patrick Pegan Kelly and Señor Michael McGinnity, two good sugar men from Louisiana, were looking for work and knowing that he was always on the lookout for good men, I had taken the liberty of advising them to apply to him.

They took the letter with grudging thanks and left.

Don Pablo Martínez, one of the largest land-owners and sugar-growers in the State of Morelos, who had suffered severe losses at the hands of the bandit Zárate during

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the early months of the Madero revolution, and who, at the time of this story, was reported to be paying five thousand *pesos* monthly to the great Attila of the South for protection. He maintained a Mexico City office, rarely going himself to his *hacienda*.

Imagine my surprise on meeting him several days later, to receive his thanks for the two excellent Americans I had recommended to him. He had sent them to the *hacienda* immediately, as he needed foremen, the Spaniards who had been working for him as overseers having either been killed or deserted and gone with the bandits.

Don Pablo, let me remark, is quite wise in his generation. He was very close to the then-government. But whether or not he knew of the plans of my adventurous friends and was interested in their success, will ever remain the personal and exclusive knowledge of my friend, Don Pablo.

Time slips by in Mexico quite as it does in other parts of the world. No longer in the quiet, siesta-like, sunshiny way it did under Don Porfirio, but it still goes. The days are fuller now of a number of things, but *mañana* changes to *hoy* and then is *ayer*, while other tomorrows and todays always appear to take the place of those gone by.

The government struggled with the Zaratistas in Morelos, with other bandits in Mochoacán, in Coahuila and in Sonora, heard the growl of local merchants distressed by diminishing business, and railroad lines cut, which meant no mail or shipment of goods.

One day *El Imparcial* devoted the front page to the danger of immediate intervention by the hated *gringos* from the North, and told of the regiments enlisting to resist the pretentious foreigners, even to the last drop of blood—*la última gota de sangre.*

The next day we would hear of the efforts being made to secure the latest foreign loan. But there was always that little paragraph hidden somewhere in the "News from over the republic," which told of Zárate, the terrible Morelos bandit, ravaging towns, burning ranches, butchering the men and carrying away the women and young girls as prizes—not prisoners, but prizes.

IT WAS March, I believe, when I received the call from my two wild Irish friends. Our Mexican Spring was gone before we knew it had arrived. Then, in June, the rains announced Summer, that best of seasons, with its sunshine and showers, and its brilliant, refreshing mornings, that renew your wavering faith in purity and innocence; its cool and healing nights which lull you to sleep like a fairy wand and bring you to a brand-new world on a brand-new day.

It was just such another day as when my two head-hunters first called. On the streets, the native newsboys were calling the first extras, which red-inkedly screamed the most recent rebel outrages, when my telephone rang to say I was urgently wanted at the military hospital.

"A poor *señor* wishes to speak with you," the Red-Cross nurse said as I entered.

It was a Spaniard I had never before seen. Thin and emaciated, he extended a talon-like hand and smiled a wan smile, as he sat propped up with pillows on an army cot.

"Ah, *señor, perdone* my incapacity. My leg is shot. But I called you thus to tell you of your friends, my friends. Don Patricio requested that I impose on you with a story. He send you this."

From under the blanket of his cot he extracted a long cavalry saber. It was rusty and caked with brown mud—or was it mud?

"Ay, señor, but Patricio was the great man, the strong man—he kill the black bull with one stroke like this—*shrrr! Caramba!* But he would have been the great *torero*, with the teaching. He know not the fear. But the red bull, the third, was one *diablo*, señor; nor the great Montes himself, the greates' bull-fighter who have live could have despatche' him. He would not see the red flag. He see only the man. But that Don Patricio he fix him. If but that you and that poor Peenky migh' have witness!"

"But tell me!" I exclaimed. "How and where are this Pinky and Patrick? Did they succeed? Were they captured? Tell me, man!"

"Ay, señor, but *usted perdone.* My poor head it mix the story. That Peenky your friend, my friend, he have—how you say it—pass beyond. He dead. *Pobre* Peenky! *Dios le guarde!* At the poor Peenky they stone him; and the poor Patricio they make fight the bull, three bulls. But señor, you should have see him fight!

"I have travel. In Mexico, in Buenos Ayres, in Madrid, in my dear Sevilla herself, I have watch the bes' *toreros* of the worl' fight the wild bulls. *Maravilloso! Magnífico!* Wonderful! But señor *mio*, they

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could not hold the lamp to that Patricio. He was one *gran matador!*

"But that poor Peenky—did I tell you? That bigges' stone drop right on the head of Peenky; the rope break, poor Peenky, he dead!"

"But tell me," I said again, when the first shock of the news passed, "how it all happened? Who are you? How were my friends captured, and by whom, and when, and where? I must bring this matter to the attention of the authorities immediately."

"*Pues* señor, if you will assist me to my *medicina*, I'll begin once more and relate it all. My leg he is so painful, my poor head won't be still, for that I called you so soon. The *médico* says gangrena. Not to me, but to the nurse. You see, they shoot me in the leg as I escape. Patricio he help me escape. He knows that I may go way Peenky goes, so he says "beat it." That was night after the great fight with bulls.

"I beat, but that fool guard he shoot. I escape but that leg he pain me much. Perhaps I live; I think not—*quien sabe!* But you mus' not communicate the story to any one. Peenky accustomed say 'forget the government.' They can not help. They be surprised if you inform them. Patricio and Peenky and me, *siempre su seguro servidor*, we go on mission for government and not for government. If we win, yes. If we lose, no. We lose.

"BUT hear: I am Francisco Escandon de le Monteros, Spanish gentleman and always *su seguro servidor.*

"I was born in Sevilla, that dear Sevilla. My family—but you care nothing for my family. I was—how you call him—*'el chivo prieto,'* the dark brown sheep. I ran away. I saw the world, many places, many sides of these places, much of life.

"I came to Mexico, very poor, broke, you say, no? I am well educated. In the college at Sevilla. I even learn your English. But in Mexico there is no work, they say, because of revolution.

"Finally I get job with Don Pablo Martínez in Morelos. I am *cabo*, boss, at first of gang of *peons*, then, later, *mayordomo*. One day comes to me two *gringos*, that Patricio and that poor Peenky, with letter from Don Pablo that says give them work, as both good sugar men.

"I give them work bossing *peons*. In one, two days, maybe, I see they not sugar men. They speak in very good Mexican-Spanish, they good boss, make the *peons* work hard, but they do not know about sugar. So I ask them why? I know they not in Morelos for health sake. I know *también* Don Pablo is not send *cabos* who not know sugar. By then we very good friends. They know my opeenions 'bout Morelos, 'bout government, 'bout Zárate. I have tell them that if *gobierno* only capture that *diablo* Zárate, we have good times and make much money on *hacienda*. So then they tell me—they are after capture head of Zárate.

"*Carambal* But such a nerve! *qué valientes*, no, señor? And what *locos*, too! I say immediate, 'go on join army, go fight bull, go fly *aeroplano*, something safe like that; but do not suicide yourselves!' They say they get Zárate's head. *'Por Dios, hombres!'* says I, you will leave him two heads and not capture one!'

"But them *gringos*, they very sure, very *convencidos*. They tell me: 'come 'long,' I laugh at first, but after, I go 'long. Why? *Pues* señor, them birds of a feather, how do you say it? go in flocks, no? I black sheep, too.

"We arrange everything; I wire Don Pablo send other *mayordomo*, for I sick and mus' go to the city. Everything all ready, then, *carambal* one morning arrive the Zaratistas.

"*Psst, pssl, zing, spatl* Bullets hitting all round. The *peons* run for cane field, immediate everyone gone but me and Patricio and Peenky. We slip into the office. Then shootin' stops and Zaratistas ride in. Four hundred and eighty of them, señor, and but three of us. What can we do? 'Nothin',' says I and 'nothin',' says Peenky. But that Patricio, his eyes let go flash and he say wait. 'You leave'm to me; I fix 'em.'

"He take pistol in each hand and open door, standing there just casual like. The Zaratistas are there in front, with big black Don Felipe Nero, *'el raptor negro,'* they call'im down there, leading them.

" *'Buenos días*, señores', says Patricio most innocent, like that in Spanish. "An what you desire 'round here?'

" *'Que te importa?'* says Don Felipe, meanin' as Peenky says: 'none o' yer bloody business.'

"Then, just that quick as a lightning, up comes Patricio's right hand. *Bang!* it says, an' a little small hole shines through Don Felipe's sombrero.

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"Surprised? *Caramba! Caray!* That Don Felipe he so sudden surprised he just sits there on his horse with mouth open. His men look him first then at Patricio. An' Patricio he just stand there as casual-like, looking Don Felipe in the eye, never winking for a whole minute.

"Then he say again: '*Buenos días, señores*, an' what might you desire 'round here?'

"That Don Felipe he grab his pistol from the holster and shoot twice, three times, just like Patricio do, but them bullets they go way high. He take aim to shoot again and Patricio just quick raise that pistol in his left hand and *bang!* shoot pistol out hand of Don Felipe. Such a nerve! Such shooting, señor! It take much time to tell all what happen there, but truly, it was but question of a moment.

"Then Patricio he start laugh, he laugh ver' hearty, ver' loud. 'Shoot again, Don Felipe,' he say. But Don Felipe don't shoot. He turn an' look at the men. His men all looking at him. 'Sons of ten thousand dogs,' he cried, 'kill him, kill the dirty *gringo*. Will you stand there and see me murdered?'

"But not one man shoot. They just keep looking at Don Felipe. His face was black and terrible. He was a coward in his heart, was Don Felipe, but he was also a leader. Now he saw his leadership slipping and was afraid. Patricio saved him.

"'*Oiga, amigo*,' he say. 'Why fight? Let's be friends. We are not afraid, neither I nor my two friends, but we wish not to hurt you. We wish to fight along with you. *Muera el presidente y viva Don Mariano Zárate!*' he cried, and waved his hat.

"All the crowd started cheering, and Don Felipe smiled. He sees not the little game of Patricio. That he will study out later. But he does see that he is still the boss, the leader. The *gringo* will not kill him. Why? No matter. That's for afterward.

"Then Don Felipe dismounts and comes into the office. We have drinks, many drinks, and much talk while the rebels are rounding up the stock and sacking the buildings. Patricio explain to him that we hate *el gobierno*, oh, how we hate them! We hate Don Pablo Martínez; we want above all things on earth to join Don Felipe to fight for the cause, and for Don Mariano Zárate.

"Every one get drunk, that is, every one but Patricio, Peenky and me. Patricio tell Peenky that if take more than three drinks, he shoot him. Peenky remain ver' sober.

"Then Don Felipe call all men together an' explain that we new recruits to fight for great cause. *Peons*, which also drunk, yell *vivas* for *gran gringo*. They forget all about poor Peenky an' me. No matter, we accomplish first part of the work; we going with Zárate.

"'Oho,' say Patricio that night, 'all arranged. We Zaratistas. I captain under Don Felipe. You both soldiers. Now we get that *cien mil* bucks.'

"BUT señor, how little he know! Then the sadness begin. Did I tell you of Ana María? There is a woman in every story, at the bottom of every trouble. In the stories that are written, señor, she is always present. In the stories of real life, she seldom appears, but she is always there. We men, who love her, who revere her, who honor her, even when we know she is culpable, we protect her name and reputation because we prefer to suffer for her.

"But in this story, she appears only one time, and all you need to know is that the Virgin Mary was too good to her. She made her a *peon*, but she made her beautiful. It is an unfortunate combination. That poor Peenky, he like her exceedingly. First time he see her in the *hacienda*, he talk to her, about his business, while he make love to her, that he going to make much money, going capture great bandit. *Pobrecito* Peenky! Señor, I have learn but two things ver' well in my life—never get ver' drunk, and never fall in love; but if you do, never do the two together, or you is lost. These wine! These women! They make all the trouble.

"Evidently, Don Felipe he fin' Ana María the same night. These Zaratistas, like all barbarous, have only one program always—they attack, they kill, they rob, they get drunk and then they look for women. Maria is pretty fool. She proud to be chosen by Capitán. She talk, she tell all that Peenky told her. How do I know? Well, listen.

"Nex' morning we leave for South. They say Zárate call all bands unite for big council at Matahuac. He knows that *gobierno* is sending big army to Morelos, and wants study plan for to meet them. Three days we

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travel south, past Puente de Ixtla, Cajones, San Rafael, Buena Vista, third night we camp near the Gran Cañon de Iguala.

"We're in the mountains now, in wild an' practically deserted country. Only few Indian wood-cutters live there. We camp on edge of cañon. You do not know the Cañon de Iguala? Three hundred *varas*, nearly one thousand feet deep right there, with sides as straight almost like that room wall. At the bottom, railroad tracks an' rocks. Only a few sheep trails lead down.

"There we camp. Every night since we leave *hacienda*, Don Felipe make us sleep center camp. Special honor, he say, but we know so that we can't escape if we desire.

"It's maybe middle night when I awake, awful dream, an' find men tying me with lasso. Off on one side, by moonlight, I see Peenky all finished tied up; on other side, dozen men trying hold Patricio. Finally they overpower him. Then they place us all in row, all bound so that we move not.

"Don Felipe comes; he spit on us all individually.

" 'Dogs of *gringos* and *gachupines!*' he cried. 'You capture the grand Zárate, eh? You cut off his head, eh? You get *cien mil pesos*, eh? You wait, just wait *hasta mañana;* tomorrow we see who lose the head!'

"Señor, I have many times thought it would not be hard to die in battle. Something quick, just like that, when you unexpect it, and *psst!* It's all over. When the bullets came, when I escape, the one which hit me in the leg—I almost hope one hit me right in the head and finish all quick. That's nice; that's easy way for to die.

"But señor, when you know *el diablo vivo* has you captured, when you know he will not kill you easy like shooting, that's much different, señor. That was the longes' half night I ever spen'. Peenky, he is crying, he confess when Patricio accuse him, that perhaps he had tol' the girl. Patricio never say one other word—just sit and think and think, all the night. He not scared—he just plan some way out.

"Señor, did you ever very much want to kill a man? Did you ever hate so that you could taste it, so that you would be willing to suffer in the hell ten thousand years just so you get your hands on one man's throat, to choke the life out of him, not quickly, but slow like, all the time watching it go an' enjoying the agony, every minute of it? Did you? No; but you did not.

"I am a Spaniard, Spanish gentleman. You Saxons think you know how to love and hate, but ah, señor, you know not. It is only we Latins who know.

"Through that long night I lay, I think and I hate. Oh, how I hate! For I know what Don Felipe goes to do. He, too, who is bastard mixture of Spanish and Indian, he know how to hate.

"In the morning they bring us coffee. Don Felipe no come, but men treat us decent. Peenky he cheer up some, but Patricio, he know like I know, and he say not one word.

"We hear men talk. Say make camp two, three days. *Otra vez* I know we finish here. Then along about eight o'clock in morning, some men come and carry poor Peenky 'way. When sun get hot where we lying, men bring *petate* mats when I tell them and fix up shade over us. Treat us ver' nice. One time more I think that bad sign when Latin treat prisoner nice. Weak bull makes no good fight.

"About an hour later they come for us. Two men to carry me and four to carry Patricio. They take us to edge of cañon, 'bout hundred *varas* from the camp out on top side of *promontorio* where we get good *vista* of the sides of the cañon.

"Then is when I start hating Don Felipe good, all over again. *Madre mía, señor!* But what a sight! *Qué barbaridad!* There hangs the *pobrecito* Peenky on end of a lasso, 'most hundreed feet down side of cañon. We on the *promontorio* look right down on 'im, before and below us, for they tie Patricio an' me lying down, where we can watch straight at 'im. They have cut off his bindings so his hands and feet go free, but the lasso is tied under his arms. He dangles down side of cliff like big bug at end of a thread, starin' up at us with most white face. Peenky is most terrible frightened an' *con razón*, for listen.

"Comes then Don Felipe to us, laughin'.

" '*Qué tal amigos míos?* Now we see the great sport, and you shall be the judges of my new game. You see the Peenky, the great Peenky, who would cut off the head of the *glorioso* Zárate? *Pues bien*, to the *hombre* who can hit him with a stone, I give a prize—a prize to *cada hombre* what hits him. First prize, one great *caballo*, which the man select at the next *hacienda* we enter; next prize, one gran' saddle; next prize—oh, *bueno:* I think two hits will be

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sufficient. *Vamos a ver.* If no one hit him, on my word *de* honor, I turn him free. Peenky he understand all. He going play game with much *entusiasmo*. I start game. Watch me,' and he picks up stone to throw it.

"That Don Felipe is *el demonio*.

"Patricio can't see this devil, as we are tied so we can not move to look 'way from Peenky, but he curse him. Ah, señor, but how he curse! You no speak the *Español* ver' good, señor, probably; but Patricio, he know her well. Nowhere will you find a language so profuse in—what you call 'em—cusswor's; nor one which lends hersel' so well to denunciation. The people which hates well mus' have words to express that hate.

"I travel much. I hear many Spaniard curses. I myself Spanish gentleman. But señor, on my *palabra de honor*, I never hear curse Spanish spoke as Patricio speak her. He start with the time when outcast Spanish traitor first meet that Indian woman to whom Don Felipe trace his ancestry; he describe them, all through the half a hundred generations an' then go on to as many generations yet to come. An' perhaps he is afeard he neglect some, so he start an' go all over it again with many variations. Such cursing!

"Those Zaratistas never hear such thing. They forget to throw stones listening to Patricio, and Don Felipe *mismo* seems can not help listening, too. *Mientras*, poor Peenky is hang there in the air, also listening. But, finally, Don Felipe start cursing, too. He kick Patricio where he lay, and spit on him.

" 'Dirty gringo dog!' he call at him. 'Come on, *muchachos*, a ver' *quien gana el caballo*. Let's see who wins the horse'—and he throw a stone at poor Peenky.

"Then they start their game. Of course, they do not play fair. First they throw one at a time. Peenky grab lasso above his head, an' has feet fixed against side of wall to watch over his shoulder at us, and the men that throw. He dodge well. No one hits him. Then two, three throw together. It's not fair, *por supuesto*, no! For these are Zaratistas an' know not play fair. But still he dodge them.

"I begin wonder will he escape. But no. Now I see the men gathering rocks right over where rope is tied at top of the cañon, right over the head of the poor Peenky. Not stones like you can throw, but boulder, *grandes*, all man can roll.

"We yell, 'Peenky, look out!' The Zaratistas near kick us an' throw other small stones at Peenky, which he dodge easy. An' then they roll them over above him. He look up and jump, because he see them coming—he jump straight out from side of the cañon, but he jump too soon. Just when he swing back, big rocks reach him. That lasso break—I close the eyes!

"Señor, I like not to think of it now. Patricio start cursing again softly, slowly, but, ah, señor, with such feeling! Now he curse a little in Spanish, but mostly in the English. The height of emotion brings us always back to our own tongue. When they let us up, so I can see Patricio's face, I thank *el buen Dios* I am not Don Felipe Nero. I, a Spanish gentleman, am not superstitious, but señor, I not desire the weight of those curses on my soul.

"THEN they carry us back to the camp an' place us in the shade again. At midday, they bring us food. We eat. To starve, would have been foolish. We know that we two are condemned, are dead already. But there is always one chance — and a full stomach helps any chance.

"It's about three o'clock when they again come for us. Me, they carry, but they untie the feet of Patricio so he can walk; but we are all the time well guarded by armed men. To try to escape is a folly.

"We are conducted to an old stone corral, formerly used by the *vaqueros*—cowsboys, no—to guard their flock at night. The walls are maybe five feet high. We see where Zaratistas have repaired several places where the stones have tumbled down, so that, except the open entrance at one side, it is nearly a complete circle—might be hundred feet across.

"You have witness some bull fights, señor, no? You have seen the great Miura bull come charging into the arena, mad to despair, the blood lust in his eye, who rush for the first thing he see that move? Ah, but señor, you should have witness the fight at the old stone corral, at the top of the *Cañon de Iguala* in the wilds of Guerrero. For the *bravo*, the cruelty, the heartlessness I never, no never see its equal. Poor Patricio, he did not know, but I smell the rat immediate.

"Patricio was to fight the bull. He was to be sacrifice' that way, for to dare to think

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of cutting the head off that bandit Zárate.

"When we arrive at corral, there stan' Don Felipe at the entrance.

" 'Oh, *cuanto me alegro de verlos señores*—how happy I am to see you. I hope you fin' yourself ver' well, eh? Now, we wish that you assist at a little *fiesta* that we arrange for this good afternoon. We hear the señor Americano is the great bull-fighter, *el gran torero*. My men desire to see. I have inform them that the señor gringo, the Don Patricio, is greatest livin' *torero*. He fight not one, he fight many bulls.

" 'My men all satisfied, all *muy conformes* if señor gringo kills the bulls, that he go free, back to Mexico. I feel very much sorry that we no have the fine bull, bulls great of Spain, which my other friend here know so well, but the task is impossible. Of Spanish bulls there is not one. But we have some ver' small bull de Guerrero, which not fight so much, maybe, but which not so bad, no so bad," he chuckled.

" 'I inform my boys the señor Americano is mos' gran *torero*, he play with cape like Pastor—he place the banderillas better than Gaona, he kill the bull better than Montes, *el gran matador*. He not need help. Am I not right *señor amigo?* I sure you will show thes' brave soldier that Don Felipe never speak but the truth, no?'

"Patricio look at 'im and say just one word in Español; that word which not even a Zaratista *perdida* able hear. Don Felipe turn red, make as if strike Patricio, then stop. Instead he turn to his men and yell:

" '*Traigan los toros*—bring the bulls!' "

"Señor, you know in bull fight two things most absolutely indispensable: bull mus' follow red flag, and the men who help the matador—the man who does the killing—they mus' tire the bull. For this they have the horses too. The bull mus' have tired neck, and hold head low, or impossible to kill him correctly, impossible to insert sword between shoulders.

"When bull charges first in ring one man with red cape stan' near far side of ring, from where bull enters. He swing cape. Bull charges towards him. When nearly reaches man, he throws cape one side. If bull follows cape, all right. But if he goes for man, all wrong. They send him back, for he is *toro loco*. No matador in the world will try to kill him. But if he all right, then cape men they make bull run, tease him, tire him some.

"Then the picadores call the attention of the bull, prick him in the neck with their long poles, and for what: for that the bull be weakened, not so strong when he attacks. They let him gore horses. For the same reason, not because any one wants to see horses killed or wounded, but because bull must be tire out, then he not hold his head so high; he drops it with nose near ground.

"Then come the banderilleros—those what stick the little sharp barbed arrows adorned with gay-color paper, in bull's shoulder. They hurt him much; he paws and bellows, he swing round in circles, but he can't get them out and he tire himself some more. Then, and only then, comes matador to kill bull; bull is tired, is prepared. To dodge him is easy work, for he makes now but short charge at the bright red flag and does not follow after either man or flag. All bull wants is that they let him alone; he wants man go 'way and not molest him.

"SO, YOU see, señor, the barbarous cruel conception of Don Felipe. He make poor Patricio go into the ring and kill fresh, untired bull. No man, not even the great Montes attempts it. No man can do it—no man but Patricio. Ah, señor, that was one great bravo man, that Patricio!

" 'See here, Paco,' he say to me, 'I'm done for. I'll try to make them kill me, as I don't appreciate die on horns of bull. If you get 'way, hunt up my fren' in Mexico, and tell him—tell him all. He can't do anything, but you tell him that that tip about the lottery was good. And listen: if you get away, strike due east for Puebla. It's your only chance. Now, let's get at it.'

"Not one sign of fear, not one only objection to the hard fortune. Ay, señor, may Francisco de los Monteros, a Spanish gentleman, go to his death like that.

"They give to Patricio an old saber. 'With this you kill them,' they say. But Patricio insist that no. 'Give me one that weigh more,' he say. 'One of size for man, hombre.'

"Don Felipe bring one—that one you have there on your knees, Señor. Patricio say it is good. They push him into the corral and untie his hands. The Zaratistas are seated on fence all around. To escape is impossible. There is no chance.

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"Then comes ridin' three men, dragging the bull who is roped around the horns. Patricio, with his saber and red blanket they give him instead of cape, retire to other side of ring. They drag the bull inside an' loose the ropes. Then they close entrance with the *trancas*, the big sticks.

"The bull is ver' mad. He stand an' paw the ground, looking 'round for something to kill. Ah! Then he see Patricio and charge.

"Now, I expec' of course that Patricio play with him, let him fight the cape, tire him out, as he has seen the bull-fighters do, then maybe he can kill him. But no, *por Dios!* When bull charge, Patricio he grab the saber in his right hand, the cape in the left. He wait—not moves at all, till bull ver' near. Then he move the cape backward.

"The bull lowers his head to strike, when *caramba!* that Patricio he drop the blanket, and *whang!* bring the saber chopping down right behind bull's ears. Señor, my word of honor as a Spanish gentleman, he nearly cut the head off. Such strength! Such nerve! It is thing never seen anywhere.

"In the great bull-rings of the old world and the new I see the great toreros fight the bull, many bulls, big bulls, little bulls, bulls *bravos*, and bulls *huidos*—cowards; but I never have see a nerve like that. Even the Zaratistas yell *vivas*. I look sharp, quick, but I see no sign of pity in them, not one probability of mercy for the poor Patricio.

" '*Otro toro!*' they cry. 'Another bull.'

"They drag him in—but the bull he say: 'No; I do not fight today.' He stan' ver' quiet an' paw the ground, but he refuse see Patricio an' red blanket on the other side of the corral.

" 'Go after him!' yell the crowd, but Patricio he only laugh.

" 'Forgit it you,' he say; an' then add in Spanish: 'I not conducting this funeral. I'm the remains!' an' then he laugh again.

" 'Be careful, Patricio,' I admonish him in English. 'Maybe we don't know what is goin' to happen.'

"You see, I did not want to increase his hopes too much, señor, as I knew he was lost anyway; but you can never tell what the great *Dios* plans to do.

"So they take that bull out an' bring other. This one has decidedly unretiring deesposition. Also, he ver' angry. Immediate he see red capa, he flies for Patricio.

"*Adios, Patricio bravo*, I say to myself.

"But that Patricio, señor, *ay Dios!* There is one brave man, the—how do you say it—the large head too. He know the bull not charge entire unless flag move. When thing not move the bull approach near, but never strike. So Patricio, when bull starts, retires near stone wall of corral with the cape directly in front of him. Then when the bull comes near he agitates it violently.

"It work in manner *magnífica*. With terrible speed comes the *toro*, mos' furious, and when he arrive ver' near, he lower his head an' charge. *Caramba!* But what work, mos' quick, and it need the gran' head to do it. But that Patricio he know how. Just at last second he step from behind flag and crash, bang! That bull he go nearly through the stone wall. Half stun', he slip, falls on knees.

"That moment Patricio swing saber and nearly sever his hind leg. Twice, three times, he slash, and bull sink down behind, his rear parts entirely useless.

"*Caray, hombre*, but how them Zaratistas yell. They never see bull fight like that, an' they like it fine. No one else ever saw such fight *tampoco*, señor; that was wonderful, *magnífico*. If the ghosts of Montes, Lagartillo or Botello could but have seen it, they retire for shame, for Patricio he break all the rules of the game. That Patricio he is fighting for his life, not for *dianas*, not for *bravos* of audience. With no knowledge, nor skill, nor men to assist him, he mus' depen' on his great stren' an that great head.

"When Patricio see that bull can not stand, he approach carefully an' kill 'im with that little thrust of sword at the base of the brain, that thrust which all good bull-fighters use on incapacitated bulls.

"ZARATISTAS drag corpse out an' repair fence. But the show is not over—hardly has it begun; and Patricio knows it, as I know it also. But *Madre mía!* Señor, I begin to have hope—just the least little ray of hope. Don Felipe looks much worried. That increase my hope. He not expect that any gringo kill one bull, much less two bulls. But hear: the crowd is get *impaciente*.

" '*Traigan el otro toro!*' they shout. 'Another bull yet. Bring the big black one! Let's see the gran matador Americano chop him up!'

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"But just the same, señor, there was a note of admiration in their eyes, in their voices, which I, who watch close, notice well. Patricio see it not. He is fighting for his life, señor. He not observe the little things. Convinced that he would ultimately be killed, he forget the hope but he determine sell his life ver' dear—show that Don Felipe Nero how the Americano gentleman die.

"Ah, señor! At such moments you see the real bravery. When the hope is gone, when the man know that there is no escape, then you see the material of which the man is made. And that Patricio, my frien', he is all a man. He not know what I already begin to suspect, that Don Felipe has not any more bulls than this—and if the one they bring in does not finish Patricio, then —but listen.

"They bring the big black bull and push him inside the corral. Immediate I see that compared with this *toro* the others are only little calves. He do not see Patricio nor the red blanket. Released inside he start for the Zaratistas sitting on the fence, and they tumble off like tenpins.

"That bull he goes cleaning the fence all way around until he come near where is Patricio himself. Just the shadow of one *momentito*, Patricio jumps too quick for him, and he misses, but so quick he is, too, that Patricio can not strike with sword.

"Then, señor, begins the real fight, the fight which is greates' ever fought by any torero in any bull-ring in the worl'. Patricio, he throw away his cape. It's useless entirely, as the bull is one of those locos which the real torero never fights. When the bull refuse to follow cape, no matador goes against him. It's suicide. Without the cape, which the bull think is the real enemy defying him, bull-fighting would be impossible.

"After first charge agains' Patricio, bull follow fence trying get at Zaratistas, as all men look alike to him—he want to kill some one, but cares not which. They tumble off fence and hide behin' her so bull not see them. Then he again turn to Patricio, which is waitin' for him at other side.

"Then real bang, the bull he charge. With his wide-spreading, sharp-pointed horns, those powerful shoulders which can easy toss horse clear over his back, he make terrible appearance as he tears up earth in the rush across the corral toward Patricio. I see not how he can escape now.

"But just when bull almost reach him he wave sword, plant feet close together an' yell, then jump on one side—how you call it—he sidestep. But this time he lack that *momentito*, that sharp point of bull's horn catch him in his pantaloon. It's all over. I close my eyes. Not one word you hear but that mad bellow of the charging bull.

"Then all at once the air full with the cheer of the men.

"Then I look.

"*Bendito Dios, señor!* It can not be believed, but there is Patricio sitting square on that bull's back, riding him like a horse, hacking his neck with that saber. It seems that when the bull toss him in the air he land square on the *toro's* back.

"*Madre mía!* But what a sight! Patricio, he stick them long feet of his behind bull's front legs and chop and chop on bull's neck. That bull he loco, frantic. He jump, he swing his head, he buck like bronco! He kick, he run to fence, try scrape off that terrible enemy which torture him.

"But Patricio stick fast. I think the fence get him sure, but the stones they give way before Patricio's leg does and bull, bleeding in stream, starts across the corral. It is the most terrible, the most *grandioso* sight, señor, that I have ever see—I who have fought the bull, which have seen a thousand fights in all the best bull-rings of the worl', by those renown toreros.

"Finally the bull begin to weaken. His neck like hash, the blood running to the ground; he totter when he run. No longer he kicks an' bucks. But Patricio, he weakened too. The strain is terrible. From where he is sitting he can not strike 'cross bull's neck, but has to hit him lengthwise or strike on the side of the neck. Nor can he strike with the same force like when on the ground.

"I doubt, I wonder. Will he survive the terrific strain?

"Señor, it takes long to tell, but it probably happens all in two or three short minutes. The bull, he continue 'cross the corral, more weak every moment, Patricio hacking every step, until bull runs plump into wall at other side.

"That finish it. He sinks on knees, and Patricio, struggling to his feet, run that saber through black bull's heart.

"It is done. He has won!

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"Such a cheering, señor, as breaks out in that crowd! The great Montes, the torero mos' grand that ever live, himself would never have forgotten it. They rush into the ring, them barbarians, who had condemn the great Patricio to death that morning—grab him in their arms—carry him 'round the corral.

" '*Viva el gran torero Americano!*' they cry.

"Señor, I begin to have hopes. Is it possible that they not kill him yet? I look for Don Felipe, and see him standin' near gate, frown on that black face, without saying one word. Pretty soon the Zaratistas let Patricio down, an' he walk limping toward Don Felipe.

"I hol' my breath. What that man mean now? Why he not be still or appeal to men for life? Ah, señor, not Patricio. He the brave man, and he also—how you say it in the English—he the gran' bluffer, too. He approach to Don Felipe with the saber in his hand, breathing hard still, but with that glint in his eye I see when he tackle that first bull.

" 'Come on, now I fight you,' he say right in Don Felipe's face. 'I fight no more bulls. If you lead these men I challenge you to fight, or if not, you coward.'

"Señor, *mi palabra*, it was very foolish, ver', but it was glorious. Perhaps it was just exac' thing to do, who knows. Don Felipe's black face get blacker, an' he reach for his pistol. But then he look at men an' stop. What he see in them faces he do not like. He look at Patricio, he look back at men again. Then he begin smile. Don Felipe is no fool—no fool can lead six hundred wild barbarians like those Zaratistas.

" 'No, señor *mió*,' says Don Felipe, 'We not fight. You are too valuable a man for us to kill. I invite you join us. We need the brave Americano to fight with us. What say you, men?' He turned to those Zaratistas.

"Such a yell as he get for an answer. They grab Patricio before he can say yes or no an' carry him 'round that corral again, but with ten times more gran' enthusiasm than the first time. When you see them you realize how much those Mexican like the bull-fight—how much they love the bull-fighter—how much even they think of brave men. I been watching Patricio's face, an' I very doubtful if he accept, as he's so mad. But when they set him down he sensible.

" 'I accept the honor,' he say, 'but only on one condition: that you set my friend free, also, that he may likewise join with us.'

"Ah, señor! There is the good friend. Rescue from the jaws of death one minute, he refuse to accept his life unless his friend can live also.

"Don Felipe, he says 'yes' immediate. He is not taking any more chances with his men that day—he had seen them so nearly slip from his leadership, that Patricio could have asked anything and got it.

"That is all, señor. Next day we fin' poor Peenky and bury him decently, covering up his grave with stones so that the coyotes not get him. *Pobrecito* Peenky! If they only set his execution after that gran' bull fight, he, too, might have escape, but the good *Dios* order it otherwise.

"How I come here? *Pues* señor, I can not feel that I can join them murderers—I can not. That night I explain to Patricio.

" 'Tis well,' says he. 'I fix it so that you escape tonight. But I go with them. Yet, I get that hundred thousand pesos.

"Ah, señor, there is the brave man, the gran' torero! What a pity he was not a Spanish gentleman, with the great Montes for teacher!"

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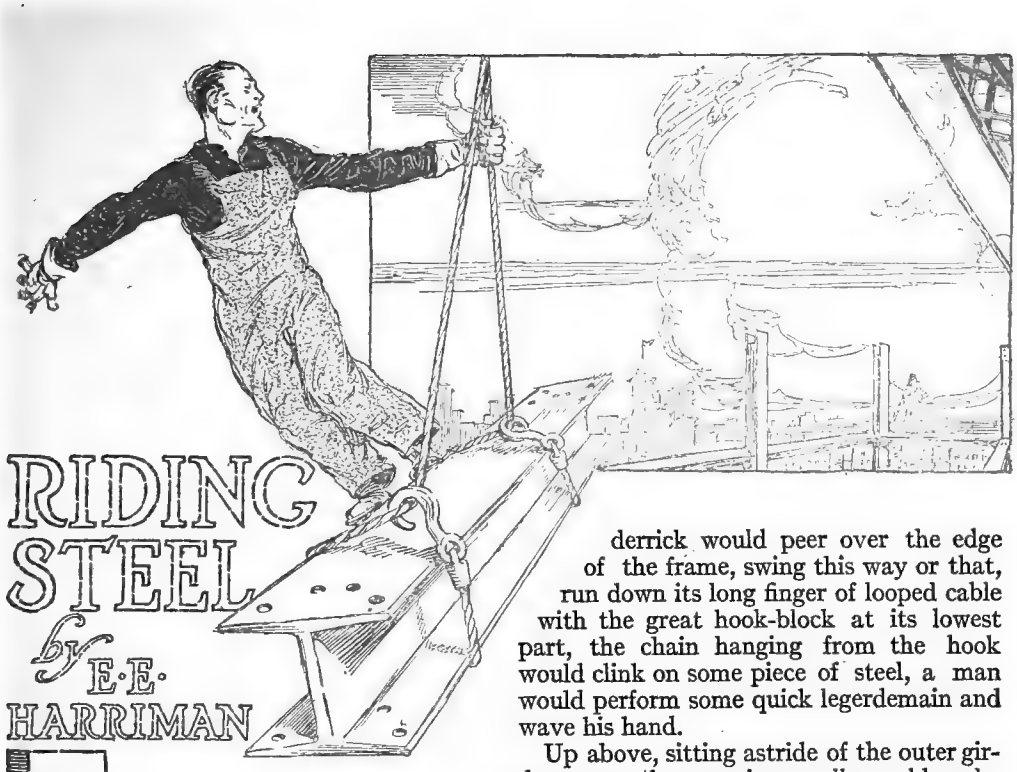

RIDING STEEL

by E. E. HARRIMAN

AL MELLEN could never tell how or why he thought only steel in that wild ride with Death grinning at him from the farther end of the girder—why he did not think of himself more and forget the crowd below in the street, the workmen in the frame and the frame itself. For it was a wilder race than Oldfield ever rode.

The frame of the huge eleven-story building for the Menifer Department Store had risen with much clangor and stuttering of the pneumatic hammers to the level of the ninth floor, and the open-work checkerboard of beams and girders at that level were all in place. The back row of columns had been set for the next story and a line of girders capped them.

A little forward of the center of the building the derrick had set its broad, flat foot down firmly and taken a grip on the steel that allowed it to maintain its position where it could reach out over the street, past the planked timbers that protected the foot-passengers, out till the hook-block could drop straight to the piles of steel that lay all along the two frontages.

As if gifted with reasoning power, the derrick would peer over the edge of the frame, swing this way or that, run down its long finger of looped cable with the great hook-block at its lowest part, the chain hanging from the hook would clink on some piece of steel, a man would perform some quick legerdemain and wave his hand.

Up above, sitting astride of the outer girder, some other man in overalls would make a slight gesture with his hand and the steel would bid good-by to its companions with a clang and soar as if gravity were annihilated.

With every piece of large steel went a rider, balancing, guiding, keeping the nose of the girder well out from interference with the set work, poising carefully for the final swing that would lower it to its appointed place.

If it was a column, it hung almost upright with the man riding on its lower flange till it teetered gently into place, and the two fitters dropped their drift-bolts into place while they made fast with temporary bolts inside and out.

If it was a girder, the rider stood on one side of the chain, his feet balancing, one hand holding the chain and the other signalling to the man astride the upper girder, who in turn passed the signal on to the brains of the derrick.

This was a steady-eyed man in blue overalls that covered him to his chin, his hand as sure as that of a surgeon, his mind as intent. In either hand he held a lever, and as he pushed or pulled the derrick rose or fell, turned to the right, or to the left. A third lever controlled the drum on which the cable coiled.

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For four years Dick Ogden had stood on the turntable and controlled the movements of this helper, and his employers said he was the best derrick man in Los Angeles. In faithfulness and knowledge of his duties he had shown himself among the best.

He thought steel from the moment those overalls were donned till the whistle gave permission to doff them. His conception of the duty he owed to his job was as high as that of a defender of a fort, or that of a captain of a passenger vessel in a fog. He gave his utmost. Every load was lifted without a jerk, swung smoothly up and around to its place and was deposited lightly and surely. With each load landed right, his heart gave a little throb of pleasure that it had been done workmanly.

Every time a load came over the edge with a rider, a smile or nod passed between the rider and Dick, for Al was to marry Dick's eldest daughter as soon as the mariposa lilies were in bloom again. Only this morning she had called to Al, as he waited for Dick to light his pipe at the gate, that he was to come home with dad to supper.

When blue-eyed, broad-shouldered Al had stood facing Dick four months ago and asked him for permission to marry Bertha, Dick had grasped his hand with a grip as firm as the steel they handled every day and told him he was a son to be proud of.

"You are a lucky girl, Bert, to win the love of a man like Al. He is one of the best, sensible, steady and clean-minded. Stick to him. He is worth while and will go high if he sticks with the company. Best-conducted young fellow in the works!"

Bertha hugged her father for that speech and went away with her eyes shining mistily. Her mother nodded in approval. She had made her estimate of Al long ago and this was only a confirmation.

Al was active, powerful, cool of head, as a man must need be when he rode steel on structural work. He must have the nerve and ready wit of a successful master mariner, or an aviator. There must be no wandering mind in that work, no dreaming of cowslips and the girl in pink, or of Gladys and the last dance.

A bit of forgetfulness, one single false move, or the forgetting to move at the right time, and some piece of steel would send its many tons of weight crashing down through the network of beams, smashing, bending, tearing at the frame, crushing lighter work, and perhaps dealing death to more than one of the workmen congregated within this hive of industry. Ever flowing hither and thither in this place went the blood of the structure, the hundreds of busy men who labored, and their lives would pay for carelessness.

Along the farther sides of the streets that bordered the scene stood hundreds of watchers, loafers, mendicants, energetic business men who paused for one hurried look, unemployed who thought bitterly of their need and of how little it mattered to the crowd how great their need might be. Men of all classes, pausing for a moment or stopping listlessly for hours, watching the droop of the derrick arm, the descent of the hook block with its dangling chain, the rider standing at ease with one foot in the hook at its lower end, then the swift and steady rise of the next load.

ACROSS the way an attorney sat in his office and watched the derrick, the men who labored, the man who rode steel and the watching, waiting crowd. His attitude was that of the intensely interested observer and he did not turn when his door opened and a man came in, but spoke over his shoulder in answer to the greeting.

"Just watch that man ride down on that chain, Vernon—watch him all the way till he steps off on the pavement! You will never see a more nervy man anywhere. All day he rides on the steel going up and in that hook coming down, and he is as nonchalant as though it was no more than sharpening a pencil. He is always so alert, too!"

"Envying him, Penfield? You have an income that is greater for one month than his is for a year. Don't waste time on him or his job."

"I tell you I do envy him! He is producing something, I'm not. I envy him his cool head, his strength, his alertness for every emergency, his job of producing something of real worth to the nation."

"Nonsense, Penfield! You have the advantage of him in every way. If it was left to him to decide, he would undoubtedly say you had him skinned a mile and would wish he had your job."

"He would get tired of it in six weeks and long for the old one. I am tired of making my money off of other men's quarrels and

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errors. I would like to be a real producer."

"Look here, Penfield! You will get more money out of the Burton-Trumbull case than this man will get for a lifetime of risking his neck on such work. Think of that and don't envy the poor chap."

"That is just what makes me sore. He risks his life and receives a pittance. I sit here, or stand in the court-room and get so much more, and my work is based on the sordid, the greedy, the evil part of life. Hang it, man, I'm tired to death of it all and want to do something besides help some man trim another, or dodge a law."

The other man laughed and moved his chair closer to the window in order to better observe the scene which so enthralled Penfield. Al and the hook had just reached the pavement and the men were making fast to a girder which was to rest upon the last column set, the second one out from the back line on the south side, and reach back to the corner where it would join the line already there with a corner grip and start the line toward the front.

The chain went round the girder, the hook made fast and Al stepped on its top flange. His hand went out in a signal, the man astride the upper girder repeated it to Dick and the cable tightened. With a bell-like clang the back end of the girder slipped off the pile and began to rise to a level with the other as Al stood closer to the chain to balance it. His left hand grasped the chain and he stood as erect and at ease as any man on the street.

The crowd of watchers in the street became augmented by several hundred as passers-by saw a new and heavy load begin its travels. Many of the people who had thought they were in a hurry before, now checked to watch the flight. They hushed their chatter of commonplace talk and stood silent, expectant of they knew not what, but with that strained feeling of attention that seizes one who sees another in peril where no aid can be offered.

Up in the lawyer's office Penfield and his friend noticed the checking of the flow along the thoroughfare that made the little whirlpool of humanity which added itself to the ever-present, though ever-changing, still water of the sheltered places under the banks of the human stream.

"See that, Vernon! The crowd always grows when he rides on an especially heavy load. Watching for a sensation, an accident of some kind. Let that chain slip, or something break, and nine-tenths of these people would go home excited and gratified that they had seen the thing happen. They don't look on him as a human being, but as a mechanical contrivance for their edification."

"Gammon! I judge them by myself, and I would run if I thought he would be hurt or killed. It would spoil my life for months to see any such thing happen. I don't think people are so morbid as that."

"I hope you are right. If that man gets hurt or killed on this job I shall change my offices to some other building. He is such a friendly fellow. Waved his hand at me yesterday when he saw me watching him, and his smile is like light on his face."

"Well, don't you worry, for he won't get hurt. He has probably done this for years and will keep on for more years, without a scratch or bump. I have seen the men working on steel work in Chicago, up six or seven stories, with the steel covered with ice from sleet, and they never seemed to notice it at all."

"I certainly hope nothing will happen to hurt any of the workmen over there. I guess I am getting tired out and nervous. I shall go away for several weeks' rest as soon as the Burton-Trumbull case is finished. I think Catalina will do me good, it is so still there."

"You need it! In the meantime forget other people and their troubles. These men are safe enough, and it won't help to worry. Be easy in your mind, for—What the devil! Look, look quick! Something has gone wrong while we are talking about it. See how fast—keep back! I forgot how nervous you are. Here, get back!"

But Penfield put his friend's hand away and stood, a little stooped, his hands thrust out a trifle and his arms bent as if he would grasp something, his eyes fixed on the scene being enacted over the way. He was fascinated and suffering.

FOR an hour Dick had been feeling sharp, agonizing pains that shot through his body and distorted it in suffering. He would bear it in silence, for he had never called for a relief man yet and did not wish to begin now. He was in charge of this derrick, and he would stick.

As he pulled the lever that controlled the drum and the cable came winding in, he

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wondered if the lunch he had eaten at a cheap restaurant had given him ptomaine poisoning.

The pains came harder and more frequently and his body was stooped from its normal erectness by the griping twists it gave him. The freedom of his movements was hampered by the position, and the hot sweat stood out on his forehead in great drops, driven there by his suffering. He looked out forward, under the arm of the derrick, as it lay with its top pointing into the northeast, watching for the head of Al to show above the frame.

Gently he tilted the derrick to a greater angle and the girder swung closer to the frame. When Al could look across the level of the ninth floor the derrick had risen till the load was only six feet outside the frame.

The side swing of the derrick-arm at that angle would just about carry the load across the southeast corner and swing it in an arc that would take it twenty feet outside at the center of the south side and bring it back right in line with the last post set. The drum went on winding and the load rose till it was two feet in the clear above the beams of the floor.

As Dick saw the load swing up to clear he stopped the drum and reached for the lever to raise the arm a trifle more. At that instant a spasm of pain, sharper and more violent than any preceding one, shot through him and he doubled over with a groan, clinging to the turntable lever for support.

He struggled against the pain and the feeling of faintness that seized him, his eyes growing dim and his breath coming with an effort. He remembered that he must swing the load in to safety and give Al a chance to save himself, and his grip tightened on the lever; then with a groan he sank forward in the first faint of his life, carrying the lever over with him to its full sweep.

Al felt the jerk of the abrupt start and grasped the chain a little more firmly as he turned with surprise to see what Dick was about that he should so change his method of handling the derrick. He saw the huddled figure and then had to turn his attention to the task of clinging and guiding.

His quick eyes went from the derrick to the pathway he must travel. He was swinging away from the frame in the arc of his circle, nearing the maximum distance, and soon would begin to approach the corner. His voice rose in a clear, resonant call that rang like the call of a trumpet.

"Heads below! Ware steel!"

Three times the call rang over the street and down through the maze of beams. When it sounded the third time, he threw his body outward as he pressed in the rear of the girder to make it travel end-on.

Down on the pavement the men who worked among the piles of steel rushed to right and left in an effort to divert the streams of foot passengers away from the building, shouting, pushing, hauling at stupidly staring men and women. The traffic officer held up the vehicles of all kinds, and there was a rush of men and women to the farther side of the streets.

Up on the ninth floor the man who had sat astride the girder and relayed signals was running along a beam, on a five-inch flange, risking his life at every step, hurrying to reach the turntable. From the back of the frame another man hurried for the same objective. Without a check, under no control, the derrick swung on.

Across the way the two men pressed their faces to the glass and watched in an agony of apprehension. Their faces were white and their eyes full of horror, but some stronger power seemed to hold them there, unable to move away.

They saw the faces appear upturned along the street, the other faces at the windows of the building facing the other frontage, the stream of men that began to pour from the frame. They saw the riveters leave their pneumatics hanging across the beams by the hose-pipes, the heaters leave their tiny forges, the boys who caught rivets drop the empty powder-cans they used as catchers, the masons on the third, fourth and fifth floors drop their trowels and the hod-carriers their hods, and all unite in a mad rush for safety.

They slid down ropes, clambered down ladders, went down hand under hand on columns, any way to get down and across the street before the danger of which they had been warned by that clear cry could smite them. They did not know what threatened, but they had heard the warning and stood not upon the order of their going.

On the corner of the frame lay a pile of planks, heavy, rough, lime- and cement-stained planks, lifted by the derrick and left here to be distributed over the beams

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as a protection to the men below, in accordance with the state law which has taken cognizance of the fact that falling bolts may at times be harder than the heads which receive them. This pile held about fifty planks in a double rank.

As the girder swung in toward the corner Al saw the danger, and again his cry rang out, so clear and loud that men heard and understood three streets away. Even as he called out his warning of "Heads below!" the girder struck the pile and the planks went scaling out like thrown chips, some turning end over end, some dropping like a plummet and some slipping down the air plane sideways or endways. One caught on the feed-wire of the street-car system, and, as the wire sank under the impact and then sprang upward, went clear across the street, its end dropping just clear of a baby's go-cart and frightening the mother into a nervous chill.

Two of the planks dropped straight down through the plank canopy over the walk with a crash. A woman fainted and was dragged across the street by two men who grasped her arms. Above the noise of the falling planks and the screams of frightened women and men rose again the call:

"Heads below! Ware steel!"

The great arm of the derrick swung out in its circle, out till the chain hung twenty feet beyond the frame, and the man hung with all his strength to the chain and wound his left leg around it in an effort to aid his arms, which now embraced it in a fierce clutch.

IN THE attorney's office the men stood in tense rigidity, silent save for the sibilance of their breath, drawn between clenched teeth. A groan from Vernon and a whispered invocation of the Almighty from Penfield when the planks went sailing out and down was all the sound they made, till Vernon broke into a gasping sob and the tears rolled down his face unheeded. He wrung his hands and the tears rained on them as he held them in front of his breast.

Penfield still held his pose, with the arms half extended, as one in a hypnotic trance, and at every fifth breath he spoke the one word, "God," through his teeth, but his eyes were dry and brilliant. And still the derrick swung and the two men raced for the turntable.

The load had passed the center of its swing on the south and had turned inward. The man who had relayed signals sprang from a cross girder in a flying leap of three and a half yards to the planking that lay around the derrick, caught and ran swiftly in to the levers.

As his hand fell on the lever that controlled the table the other man came with a stooping run from the other side and his hands closed on the arms of the insensible derrick man, pulling him free of the levers and drawing him across to the clear side.

The man who had seized the levers was cool and experienced. He knew that too sudden stoppage of the turntable would be as disastrous to Al as allowing it to go on and dash him against the wall of the brick building beyond the frame. Little by little he began to slow the motion of the runaway, increasing the control with an even motion that seemed to him and the other almost unbearable.

The impulse to snatch the lever over in one hard pull was well-nigh irresistible, but he held himself in check and kept his own control. Slowly, so slowly, the derrick checked its speed, but a new danger threatened. The inertia was so great and the cable so long that the forward swing of the great load would carry it up and in, beyond anything ever provided for in the construction of derricks. Would the arm of latticed steel hold against that swing and jerk?

Fearful lest the striking of a column might snap Al off the chain, the man at the lever tried to turn the drum a little farther. But he was too late. The action on the lever had slowed the swing a little but not enough to do much good, and the girder went on its way around the circle with the force of a runaway car.

The winding of the cable on the drum that the man at the levers intended to make lift the load above the column it was heading for, and so give him a chance to stop the race in the width of the back arc, had failed to clear it, and the girder struck with a loud clang of beaten metal. The bolt on the outside flange parted with its head, the column canted sharply over till the weight and leverage of flanges broke the inner bolt, and the column dropped forward in the direction of the girder's flight.

There was but one plank across the space toward which it fell, and when the weight struck diagonally across this it snapped

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with a splintering crash, the column turned in an elliptical curve, its head caught the edge of the outer girder, the inner or bottom end swung down and out as the upper flange held for a fraction of a second, completed another elliptical curve and plunged clear of the frame to the outer edge of the planked canopy that covered the sidewalk, which it crushed to splinters.

The blow had been so mighty and irresistible that the girder had hardly shivered at the contact, but its inertia had been partly overcome by it and the levers went back with greater speed, the drum unwound and the steel settled gently down to the beams below.

Al stepped off and walked steadily to the safety of a plank-covered space, sat down on the planks and began to shake, silently, hard and steadily, like a man with the ague. With only a glance at him the two men picked up the body of Dick, carried it across to the north side, laid it on a plank and thrust other planks across the light court of the adjoining building to an open window, where a man with a gray beard stood to receive them.

Then they went to Dick and carried him across. The man at the window had called another to help him and received Dick with care but a decidedly businesslike air.

"Do your best for him, Doc. He is one of our best men," said one of the rescuers.

"Sure. He has only fainted. I'll fix him all right, no matter what the cause is, if it is possible."

The men then went back to Al and found him still shaking, though not so hard. He tried to grin at them, clambered half-way to his feet, clutched the hand of one and reeled back into the other man's arms in a collapse.

"Lay me down and let me rest a while," he whispered.

They obeyed, and he closed his eyes. As they watched him they saw his hands close tightly at intervals, his muscles swell and his jaw set.

"He thinks he is doing it all over again. Poor cuss. I wonder if this will break his nerve."

The speaker whispered his comment and his face looked troubled. The other man shook his head emphatically in answer to the last sentence, made a gesture of comprehensive import which the other seemed to read accurately, cocked his hat over one eye, thrust out his chest and strutted two steps in pantomime.

The other man read this, also, grinned and nodded. He simply conveyed his idea that Al was not overcome, but would be as cocky as ever in the morning. All this clearly told and comprehended, they went to Al and rubbed his body, legs and arms, pinched the muscles in great, horny handfuls, pounded and shook him into his normal state of muscular activity. In a few minutes he sat up, then rose to his feet and stood, a bit shakily perhaps, but squarely.

"All right, boys, I can make it if you will give me a little help to the ladders."

"Why the ladders? Can't you ride the hook? Want to wait till another day for that?"

The man eyed him curiously. He had a theory that if Al rode the hook now he would not be afraid tomorrow, but if he waited till next day his nerve would fail him. Al understood, for he had heard that discussed among the men before.

With a twisted grin he put out his hand and looked at it. It shook, though not badly, and he closed it hard, flexed his arms and swung them violently. He stood on one foot and shook the other, then reversed until the blood was flowing swiftly and tingling in his veins. At last he turned to the signalman who had asked the questions.

"I am ready. Where is Dick?"

"He is in a doctor's care. Ben, unhook the chain and swing it out."

Al stepped to the outer girder, caught the chain in both hands, set his foot in the hook and nodded to the signalman. The drum revolved, the hook rose a little way, the derrick arm lowered till its hook-block hung well outboard, then smoothly, swiftly, the cables paid out till Al slipped his foot from the hook and stood on the pavement.

On the street the people stood silent, in wonder as they saw the man who had been so close to death riding earthward on the hook at the end of the great chain. As he reached the street they woke with a shout, a clamor of rejoicing, of acclaim and friendliness.

Up in the attorney's office Vernon was edging toward the door, his handkerchief removing the traces of tears and his heart hoping that Penfield had not seen them, but Penfield cared nothing for his tears. He was on his knees with his face buried in his outflung arms as they rested on a chair seat,

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and he did not look up as the door closed softly behind Vernon.

In the doctor's office Dick gave weak answers to the questions asked him and meekly swallowed the potions held to his lips. His eyes kept beseeching them to tell him something, but the doctor would not let him ask questions yet.

When the signalman climbed in through the window he saw the unspoken question, and in utter disregard of the doctor's scowls of warning, blurted out:

"Al has gone down to get a hack or auto to take you home. He'll be up in a jiffy, and we'll get you out to your wife and your own bed."

When Al came up to the office and helped take Dick out to the elevator the doctor looked at him curiously and held out his hand. Al gave him a grip that nearly ruined his surgical work for a week, put his arms under Dick and carried him like a little child to the corridor. In the elevator the signalman faced him and reinforced his arms, while the doctor marveled over his strength and superb poise.

When they reached the cottage Dick insisted on walking with the aid of Al's arm, saying he would not scare "mother" for a farm, as he knew he would if carried in. As it was, "mother" and Bertha hovered over him in anxiety, each striving to make him a little more comfortable, until he grinned happily at Al and said it paid to be sick a little to find out how much his womenfolks thought of him.

"Daddy Ogden, you don't need to be sick or in trouble to find that out. I guess we tell you often enough and act it, too."

And Bertha stooped to kiss the cheek that looked so pale under its two-days growth of beard. Dick looked over her head and winked at Al, who responded with a grin.

"Al," said Dick, "if you would just as soon do it now as wait till April, I think it would make the womenfolks feel better to have you in the house while I am laid up, and I know I would."

Al looked at Bertha, with his big form trembling and his face eager.

"Are you willing, Bertha?"

She went over to him and kissed him.

"Any time, Al."

When the morrow came they stood beside the bed with Bertha's hand in her father's, and the old minister, who had baptized her when she was a baby, married her to Al. The steel rider took her in his arms when the ceremony was ended and held her for a moment, looking deep in her eyes without speaking. Then he bent to her ear and whispered—

"Every day as though I were just trying to win you."

And she understood.

The STORY of a PIEBALD HORSE

An Article

by General BEN J. VILJOEN

IN BOER, his name was "Blesman," in English "Piebald." He was a horse because he was born one, a soldier because he fought and died for his country, and he now lies buried in a soldier's grave on the slope of a green little hill near Lydenburg. And he was a hero because in all his soldier's life he never turned his back to an enemy while there was left a fighting chance for victory.

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A hero! Had it been a man who saved the life of his general; had it been a man who carried a wounded comrade to safety in the face of a withering fire, he would have won medals of eternal fame. Even monuments might commemorate his bravery. But these were just the deeds of a horse, my friend and companion through that campaign which marked the last stand of Boer freedom in South Africa, so if the memory of faithful old Blesman is to be preserved I must tell you this tale.

Blesman's round colt eyes first gazed at a flaming African sunrise in the Transvaal. His pink-veined nostrils buried themselves for the first time in sweet veld grass on the rolling foothills of the Drakensburgs.

His coat was chestnut. A broad splotch of white marked his forehead. And he could be spotted five hundred yards away by a half-dozen blotches of the same color on his sides. One would think a white-wash shell had burst over him.

"Tough as a Boer pony!" means much. It answers the oft-repeated British question, "How did the Boers mobilize so rapidly?" It explains in part how thirty-five thousand Boers fought off for so long ten times that number of Tommies. And pony Blesman was a true Boer.

Blesman's entry into the service was sudden. The war, so long expected and dreaded, could not hold off much longer. I was returning from a conference with our allied commanders of the Orange Free State, near Harrismith, when the horse I was riding suddenly became very sick.

Time was precious. I gave the animal medicine, then led him many miles. But the rest did him no good.

The situation was growing desperate when luck unexpectedly played into my hands. Topping a long, tedious rise I saw a short distance ahead a farm which I recognized as belonging to a famous stock-raiser.

I hurried on to the house and explained my plight. The man was a patriot, yet he hesitated. He had already sent all his horses except three to the Commando.

"Come, take my horse and give me a fresh one," I urged. "I'll pay for your care of the sick animal, as well. It is for the Republic."

The old man rose slowly from his great chair.

"It is my duty," he nodded. "My sons I have sent to the front. But if this added sacrifice will help—I will make it."

He led me to the stable. The first two horses I passed quickly and stepped in beside a sturdy-looking little piebald pony, which had turned his head and was surveying me with frank interest, both ears pricked forward. He put his soft, warm nose into my hand and we straightway were friends.

I instantly decided to take the white-faced pony. As I led him out past the old farmer I thought he gave a little gasp. Then he seized my hand.

"You've chosen the best horse I ever owned," he said; and by the quaver in his voice and by the regretful gaze he turned on the pony, I knew the old man loved that horse as only a Boer can.

"His name is Blesman," he told me as I mounted. "You'll bring him back safely, won't you?"

"When the war is over," I called back, and Blesman and I rode off down the long trail over which he was never to return.

BLESMAN'S first battle was Elandslaagte. And on that red October morning, 1899, I heard the first gun of the war as it roared its defiance to our enemies.

The real battle began at noon. Advantage in numbers lay heavily on the side of the British. Till dark, our rapidly thinning Boer line held firmly. We had lost half our command. Our appeal for reenforcements went unheeded.

We were nearly surrounded and there remained not the slightest hope for victory. Slowly, surely, the ends of the British line closed in. Their artillery ripped great holes through our ranks and covered the enemy's steady advance.

Our General was mortally wounded. Together with a commando of Johannisburgers we were fighting now at forty yards. Our two antiquated cannon long since had been silenced.

Then, just at dusk, there came a lull in the fighting. The silence was ghastly. We knew the enemy was preparing to make one final crushing assault on our center, and that we were outnumbered fully ten to one. Still we held on.

Darkness fell, and in the weird gray twilight the Gordon and Argyle Highlanders stormed us. In great waves the enemy rushed across the intervening ground and swept upon us.

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It was desperate, hand-to-hand work. We clubbed our rifles and swung them like flails. Twice we drove back the fierce Scotch charge. But our losses were tremendous.

So, knowing my pitiful handful of men would be annihilated if they fought on, I ordered a retreat.

Blesman was there to carry me through the jaws of the rapidly closing British trap. I leaped to his back. My adjutant mounted and followed hard at Blesman's heels.

At a scream, I whirled. My adjutant's horse reared, then plunged forward to the ground. Both horse and rider had been killed by a bursting shell. And I had only missed it by seconds!

The enemy's cavalry had taken a position squarely across my line of retreat. Some of my fleeing comrades no doubt had won free, but escape for me now seemed hopeless.

Straight down along the British line swept Blesman for half a mile. Then suddenly we found an opening through which the pony plunged.

Behind us thundered the heavy British chargers in pursuit. But they might have chased the wind with as much chance of success. Away into the night raced Blesman, carrying me to freedom and safety.

AT VAALKRAUS, on the Tugela River, the following February, in a vicious fight with General Buller, we had a rapid-firing Pom-Pom (Maxim-Nordenfeld) which we were playing on the enemy's lines with deadly effect. The order came to evacuate our position.

Above all, the British meant to capture that Pom-Pom or put it out of commission. They brought the fire of seventy-three field-guns to bear on our retreating force. Conan Doyle says the weight of ammunition hurled by British batteries on this occasion was greater than all the German artillery could have thrown during the Franco-Prussian War.

As we rushed our precious gun back through that withering hail of shrapnel, one horse fell, and Blesman was hitched in his place. I jumped to his back and we dashed on down the slope of the kop, through ravines, over boulders, stumbling, swerving, shells bursting all about us.

Another horse fell dead. There were four in the team. Leaping down, I cut him loose. For a moment my men gathered round me. Twenty-nine out of ninety-five were left.

Our breathing-spell, however, was cut short. The British had occupied our abandoned trenches along the crest of the rise, and were opening fire from three sides.

As I rushed to mount Blesman, he threw up his head and snorted. A thin, red line showed along his throat. He had been hit by a rifle ball. But there was no time to aid him, and he never whimpered as I flung on to his back and lashed the team forward once more.

I drove for a narrow opening between two kops, not yet held by the enemy. On and on we galloped. A shell exploded directly under the caisson, overturning the hind part. I feared the delay would prove fatal.

With great effort we lifted the gun on to its wheels and at last reached the opening. The British were rushing to cut us off. We could plainly hear the shouts of command and yells of the infantry as they raced to catch us before we reached the pass.

Time and again clouds of dust thrown up from exploding shells enveloped our little party from view for several minutes. And such moments were priceless.

At last we won through. Within an hour Blesman and his two froth-covered companions carried the gun to safety. And whirling the Pom-Pom about, we soon had it barking back at the enemy from our new position. Then reenforcements arrived and with their help I turned the defeat into a great victory.

Blesman's wound healed in time and he went on to greater, braver deeds.

AT DONKERHOCK, near Pretoria, while riding from one position to another during the heat of a battle, I beheld a wounded soldier of another command who had fallen during an assault on the enemy's trenches. His comrades had been forced to abandon him. For a mile he had crawled on his hands and knees under constant fire.

I led Blesman toward the poor fellow, dodging behind boulders or whatever shelter I could find. At length I reached his side.

"Take me out," he begged.

A bullet kicked up a tiny fleck of dust, just ahead. Another snipped a branch from a little bush on our right, and we both ducked instinctively as a shell whined by overhead.

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"That will be a difficult job, my boy," I told him. "They're raking every inch of ground ahead."

I turned to Blesman.

"What say you?" I asked the pony.

His reply was a snort and an impatient fling of his head, as if he had said:

"Hurry! We're wasting precious time."

The wounded soldier's leg had been splintered by a shell. He was losing blood fast. His face was ashen.

I gave him a long pull at my flask and injected an opiate into his arm. Then, lifting him to the saddle, I jumped up behind and gave the word to Blesman.

With nearly four hundred pounds on his back, the willing pony never so much as faltered. And through that zone of death he carried us without a scratch.

THERE are harder things in a soldier's life than battles: long marches; days with never a bite to eat, not one drop of water; nights when sleep is a stranger; sickness without the patient care of mother or wife; lonely watches when hearts ache for one glimpse of home and the loved ones left behind.

Often during the last desperate weeks of the war, we ran into those blank times when food was lacking for days. Whenever I could procure a little, I divided it with Blesman. Many a time I remember feeding him on the march. He would turn his head at a word from me, and nicker his thanks as I reached him a chunk of *askock* (ash-baked bread) or an ear of corn that I had picked while passing through some field, and saved in my wallet for him.

It was soon after Donkerhock that Blesman caught what Boers call *Paarde Silkte.* The symptoms are identical to typhoid fever. I left him at the home of an old farmer who, with his wife, doctored the pony faithfully.

To care for a General's horse was considered no little honor by these faithful souls. Blesman weakened till they had to help him get to his feet. But at length he began to mend, and in the last gray days of the struggle he loyally came back to me and took up his burden. He would fight to the end for country and his master, give his life for them if need arose—and it did.

We were crossing the enemy's cordon at midnight. It was an old game we were playing, but this did not lessen our caution.

The party was small, each a picked man. One could hardly see the rider ahead of him.

Only the muffled *thud, thud* of hoofs broke the silence. But for all our apparent safety, I felt instinctively that trouble lay ahead. I was certain the enemy was near.

Suddenly over three hundred British rose on either side of the roadway. We were ambushed!

There was no warning, not a word of surrender uttered. Three hundred and fifty rifles spat fire and death into our faces. Far out over the silent African veld rolled the crash of their volley.

With a little shudder, and a momentary stiffening of his legs, Blesman crumpled to the ground, I with him.

A bullet pierced my left breast. Another struck me, but was deflected by a small pocketbook, the leaves of which were cut nearly through. I treasure that pocketbook to this day.

The firing soon ceased. All of my command had been killed except Adjutant Bester. And I realized that Blesman's fall had saved me from further shots and death.

Through the tangle of dead horses and men, I searched out my dying horse. I spoke to him. He staggered to his feet, trembling, and put his hot nose in my hand, then rubbed it against me as if he were saying—

"Come away, come away."

Blesman could not understand why I remained there with the British.

The pony was fast weakening. He had been hit eleven times. Slowly Blesman's knees gave way under him and he sank again to the blood-soaked dust. And there on my knees by his side, I said good-by to my faithful piebald horse.

In the morning I had him buried, and his grave is marked that I may find it if ever I return. But I am now banished from the land of my birth and I shall probably never again see the resting-place of my hero Blesman.

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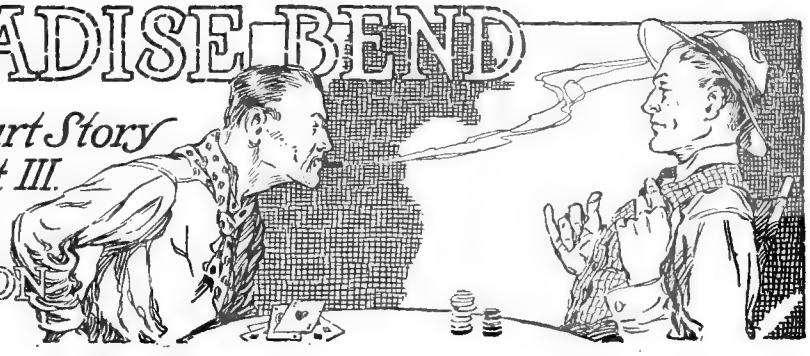
PARADISE BEND

A Four-Part Story

Part III.

by WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE.



Author of "That Which is Written," "A Pair of Queens."

SYNOPSIS—The famous Lazy River country is held by three great ranches, the Cross-in-a-box, the Bar-S, and the 88. *Tom Loudon*, cowpuncher, and *Sam Blakely*, manager of 88, are rivals for the affection of *Kate Saltoun*, whose black eyes have flashed favor at a half-dozen men. She is daughter of *John Saltoun*, owner of Bar-S, *Loudon's* employer. *Loudon* has reason to believe *Blakely's* outfit is stealing Bar-S cattle. *Saltoun* will not believe this; *Kate* favors *Blakely*, and *Blakely* frames up proof that *Loudon* is rustling 88 cows. This proof falls flat, but in a quarrel *Loudon* wounds *Blakely* and is forced to leave Bar-S.

On his way to Paradise Bend *Loudon* stops at Farewell, *Blakely's* town, where he threatens *Sheriff Block*, an adherent of 88, with exposure. Whereupon he finds a warm friend in *Captain Burr*, a tin-pedler from "the Bend." The Captain asks *Loudon* to make the *Burr* home his headquarters till he finds a job.

Loudon rides into Paradise Bend alone. A stranger, *Pete O'Leary*, arouses *Loudon's* suspicions at once. *Mrs. Burr* and her daughter *Dorothy*, give *Loudon* a hearty welcome. Old *Scotty Mackenzie*, a friend ranch-owner of the *Burrs*, hires *Loudon*. On the trail to the ranch *Mackenzie* suddenly notices an 88 brand on *Loudon's* horse. At the point of a gun he forces a promise from *Loudon* to go on to the ranch alone. *Loudon*, bewildered, dares not look back as he rides away.

Loudon is welcomed at the Flying M ranch. *Mackenzie* returns and admits his mistake. He had thought *Loudon* sent by *Blakely*, to pay an old score. *Loudon* is warned by *Telescope Laguerre*, a bunkhouse friend, to look out for *O'Leary*. They agree *O'Leary* is a secret agent of 88.

Rufe Cutling, Flying M cook, attempts to kill *Loudon*, is foiled, and leaves the ranch, threatening to get *Loudon* later. *Loudon* follows to the Bend, to meet *Mackenzie*. He is arrested by the Marshal, for *Sheriff Block* has arrived from Farewell. The charge is horse-stealing and cattle-rustling. *Mrs. Burr* suddenly intercedes in *Loudon's* favor. *Captain Burr* and *Mackenzie* arrive and *Sheriff Block* is driven from the Bend.

Cutting steals *Loudon's* pet horse, *Ranger*, *Mackenzie* and *Loudon* follow him. At Rocket *Loudon* meets *Kate Saltoun*. Her friendly advances surprise and discomfit him. Giving up the hunt for *Cutting*, he returns to the Bend and again meets *Kate*, who is visiting the wife of *Jim Mace*, *Loudon's* friend.

Loudon and *Telescope Laguerre* plan soon to start out and "get" the 88 gang. *Laguerre* believes in the same outfit he will find the man who, years before, robbed him of his wife. That night, they attend a dance which is broken up suddenly when a prospector arrives from Hatchet Creek with an appeal to save his partners from Indians.

Separating from the posse which rides to the rescue, *Loudon* and *Telescope* discover that the prospector has slipped away and is riding stolen *Ranger*. *Loudon* sprains his ankle in the pursuit. Then the posse learns the whole thing is a ruse to lure them from the Bend—why, they know not.

CHAPTER XIV

A DETERMINED WOMAN

ALONG, ragged line of dirty, tired men, and sweat-caked, drooping-headed horses, the posse rode into Paradise Bend in the afternoon of the following day. The men were quiet. Silently they dispersed to the various corrals. Loudon, his right leg dangling free, had suffered increasingly during the long ride. By the time the Bend was reached the pain in his ankle was torturing. At the hotel corral Laguerre and Doubleday helped him to dismount.

"Ye got to go to bed awhile, Tom," pronounced Doubleday. "Grab my shoulder."

"Where was you thinkin' o' takin' him?" demanded the exceedingly cross voice of Mrs. Burr.

"The hotel, ma'am," replied Doubleday, taking off his hat.

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Mrs. Burr marched forward and halted in front of the trio. She stuck her arms akimbo and glared at Doubleday.

"The hotel!" she snapped. "The hotel! An' my house close by! What's the matter with you, Frank Doubleday? My land, it's a good thing I seen you three a-comin' in here. I just knowed ye was aimin' to put him in the hotel. Ye'll do nothin' o' the kind. Ye hear me! I ain't goin' to have no friend o' mine with a game leg a-roostin' in this hotel. The beds are bad, an' the grub's worse. What's the matter, Tom? Shot?"

"It's only a sprain, m'am," said Loudon. "An' I guess if ye don't mind, I'll go to the hotel. I couldn't think o' troublin' ye, ma'am. Thank ye a lot, ma'am, but I couldn't, honest."

"Oh, ye couldn't, couldn't ye? My land, ain't ye uppity all of a sudden? Ye don't know what yo're talkin' about. Men never do, nohow, an' a sick man don't, special. Yo're a-comin' to my house, an' I'm a-goin' to put ye to bed an' cure that sprained ankle. Ye can just bet I am. Frank Doubleday, you h'ist him aboard that pony right away quick an' fetch him round instanter. If he ain't outside my door in five minutes I'll come back an' know the reason why. Hurry now. I'm goin' ahead an' get some hot water ready."

Twenty minutes later Loudon was sitting in the Burr kitchen. He was smoking a cigarette and soaking his sprained ankle in a bucket of hot water. At the kitchen table stood Mrs. Burr shaking up a bottle of horse liniment.

"What's this Frank Doubleday tells me about yore ride no'th bein' a joke?" asked Mrs. Burr.

"I dunno no more'n Doubleday," replied Loudon. "It's all beyond me."

"It's sure a heap funny. No feather-dusters, no miner folks a-standin' 'em off, an' that gent who brought the news runnin' off that a-way an' shootin' at ye an' all. It must mean somethin' though. A feller wouldn't do all that just for a real joke. It's too much."

"I wish I knew what it meant, ma'am."

"Well, it's a queer world, full o' queer folks an' queerer doin's," observed the lady, holding the bottle against the light. "Anyhow, this here liniment will fix ye up fine as frog's hair. Now ye must just lift yore foot out an' I'll dry it. Shut up! Who's running this, I'd like to know. Land sakes, why shouldn't I dry yore ankle? Shut up, I tell ye.

"My fathers, Tom, you men make me plumb tired! Idjits, the lot o' ye. No more sense than so many fool-hens. What ye all need is wives to think for ye, tell ye what to do, an' all that. There now, it's dry. Where's that cloth? Hold the foot still while I wrap it 'round Now this liniment's a-goin' to burn. But the burnin's healin'. The harder it burns the quicker ye'll get well. Sure!

"As I was sayin', Tom, ye'd ought to get married. Do ye good. Make ye steadier—give ye a new interest in life, an' all that. Ever think of it, Tom?"

Mrs. Burr rose to her feet and beamed down upon Loudon. That young man was beginning to feel strangely weak. First Scotty, and now Mrs. Burr! What was the matter with everybody? Scotty, of course, was an eccentric. But for Mrs. Burr to brazenly hurl her daughter at his head was incomprehensible. Loudon, red to his ears, mustered a weak smile.

"I dunno, ma'am," he gulped uncomfortably. "I—I hadn't thought of it, I guess."

"Well, ye'd ought to think of it. An' if ye know what's best for ye, ye will think of it—hard. I tell ye flat, Tom, a single man ain't no-account. He don't gather no moss, but he does collect bad habits. Now a wife she stops all this rattlin' round a-diggin' up what St. Peter will ask ye questions about. Yessir, a good wife keeps ye up to the bit an' a-headin' the right way."

Nervously Loudon began to roll another cigarette. He hoped that Mrs. Burr had finished. His hope was vain.

"Well now, Tom, ain't I right?" she demanded.

"Sure, ma'am, sure, plumb right," Loudon hastened to assure her.

"'Course I am. I knowed ye'd see it that way. Why don't ye do it?"

"Do it?"

"Ye know perfectly well what I mean. Ask a girl to marry ye."

"Any girl?"

"Not just any girl. If ye was to ask me I could tell ye who right quick. But I suppose that wouldn't do."

Loudon was devoutly thankful that the lady possessed some sense of propriety.

"We-e-ell, ma'am," he said slowly, "no girl would have me."

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"Did ye ever ask one?" This with a shrewd cock of the eyebrow.

"I did once."

"An' she give ye the mitten, huh? More fool she. Listen to me: when a hoss bucks ye off, what do ye do? Give up, or climb aboard again?"

"That's different."

"'Tain't a bit different. Girl or hoss, a man shouldn't ever give up. Y'asked a girl once, didn't ye? Ye said ye did. Well, ask her again. Land sakes alive, give her a chance to change her mind!"

Good heavens! Did Mrs. Burr mean Kate Saltoun? Impossible. But was it impossible? Of late, the seemingly impossible had had an uncanny habit of coming to pass. Loudon shivered. He was quite positive that he did not love Kate. The longer he considered the matter the more fully convinced he became that he did not wish to marry any one. Which was natural. Bid a man fall in love with a girl and he will at once begin to find fault with her.

"She—she wouldn't have me," dissembled Loudon. "It's no use talkin', ma'am, I'm what the fellah in the book calls a sure-enough blighted being. It makes me feel terrible, ma'am, but ye can't do nothin'. Nobody can. I just got to bear it, I guess."

He sighed enormously, but there was a twinkle in the gray eyes.

"YO'RE laughin'!" exclaimed Mrs. Burr severely. "I'd like to shake ye, I would! It ain't for nothin' that man an' mule begin with the same letter. Stubborn! My land o' livin', a girl's feelin's ain't nothin' to ye! What do you care, ye great big good-for-nothin' lummox!"

"Now, ma'am," chided Loudon, grinning, "yo're gettin' real excited."

"Who wouldn't? Here I am——"

"Say," interrupted Loudon, "when it comes to that, here I am gettin' fifty-five dollars a month. However can I get married, even if anybody'd have me, with silk dresses at five dollars a yard?"

"Silk dresses! What d'ye mean by that?"

"Why, ma'am, I wouldn't let my wife wear nothin' but silk dresses mornin', noon, an' night. Nothin' would be too good for my wife. So ye see how it is, ma'am. I dassent think o' marriage."

Words failed Mrs. Burr. It was probably the first time that they had failed her. She gasped, gasped again, then stamped to the stove and furiously rattled the frying-pan.

"Well," she suddenly remarked, "wherever can that girl o' mine be? Gallivantin' 'round with that O'Leary feller just when I want her to go to the store. Now look here, Tom, you set right still till I come back, do ye hear? No projeckin' 'round on that ankle. I'll get Ben to put ye to bed after supper."

"He needn't bother," said Loudon hastily. "I can get into bed my own self. I ain't a invalid."

"Yo're just what I say ye are. If ye make any fuss I'll put ye to bed myself. So you watch out."

The masterful lady departed. Loudon, undisturbed by her threat, gazed after her with admiration.

"She's sure a whizzer," he said under his breath. "Got a heart like all outdoors. But that ankle ain't as bad as she makes out. Bet I can hop to the door an' back just as easy."

So, because he had been forbidden to budge, Loudon hoisted himself out of the chair, balanced on one leg and hopped across the room. Holding himself upright by the door-jambs he peered out cautiously. He wished to assure himself that Mrs. Burr was well on her way to the store before proceeding farther on his travels around the kitchen.

Mrs. Burr was not in sight. Surely she could not have reached the corner so soon. Vaguely disturbed, Loudon kept one eye cocked down the street. His vigilance was rewarded by the emergence from the Mace doorway of both Mrs. Burr and Kate Saltoun. Mrs. Burr went on toward Main Street. Kate turned in his direction.

"Good Lord!" gurgled Loudon despairingly. "She's a-comin' here!"

In a panic he turned, slipped, overbalanced, and his whole weight ground down hard on his sprained ankle. The most excruciating pain shot through his whole being. Then he toppled down in a dead faint.

When he recovered consciousness Kate's arm was around his shoulders, and Kate's voice was saying, "Drink this." Through a mist he saw Kate's face and her dark eyes with a pucker of worry between them.

"Drink this," repeated Kate, and Loudon drank from the glass she held to his lips.

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The whisky cleared away the mist and injected new life into his veins. Ashamed of his weakness, he muttered hasty thanks, and essayed to rise.

"Don't move!" Kate commanded sharply. "Hold still till I pull that chair over here."

"I can get up all right, Kate. I ain't hurt."

"No, of course not. You've just shown how much you aren't hurt. Do as I say."

Kate pulled the chair toward her and was helping Loudon into it, when Mrs. Burr entered. That she had gone to the store was doubtful. At least, she was empty-handed.

"My land!" exclaimed Mrs. Burr, running to Kate's assistance. "What's the matter? Tom, did ye get up after I told ye not to?"

Loudon mumbled unintelligibly.

"I found him in a dead faint on the floor," was the illumining remark of Kate.

"Oh, ye did, did ye? I might 'a' knowed it! Can't do nothin' yo're told, can ye, Tom? I'll bet ye twisted that ankle again! My fathers, ye make me tired! Bet ye it's all swelled up now worse'n ever. Lemme look."

Expertly Mrs. Burr stripped the wrappings from Loudon's ankle.

"Thought so!" she grunted, and took the dishpan from its hook.

"Is it very bad?" queried Kate.

"Not near so bad as he's tryin' to make it with his hoppin' 'round. Land alive! He'll be lucky if it ain't lame the rest of his life. Now, Tom, I'm goin' to use hotter water'n I did before. Ye deserve to have that foot good an' scalded, ye do. I'll get the swellin' down, too, if I have to parboil ye. Don't ye make no mistake about that. Say, I don't see how steppin' on this here could 'a' made ye faint, unless—say, Tom, when did ye eat last?"

"Why, ma'am, I don't—well, I guess it was yesterday some time."

Kate uttered a soft exclamation.

"Yesterday some time!" cried Mrs. Burr, hurrying to the stove. "Yesterday mornin' too, I'll bet. I might 'a' knowed it. You fellers didn't take much grub with ye when ye went north. An' I never thought to ask when ye et last. A sprained ankle, a fifty-mile ride, an' nothin' to eat on top of it. No wonder ye fainted. Ye poor feller. An' here I been a-callin' ye all kinds o' names. We won't wait for Dorothy. I'll have somethin' to eat for ye in a minute."

"No hurry, ma'am," remarked Loudon. "I ain't a bit hungry."

"Kate," said Mrs. Burr, paying him no attention, "cut some bread, will ye, an' start feedin' him. The butter's yonder."

Fifteen minutes later Loudon was sitting at the table devouring steak and potatoes. He was hungry. With great satisfaction Mrs. Burr watched him tuck away the food.

"There," she announced, filling his coffee cup for the second time, "I guess that'll hold ye for awhile. I'll just set the coffee-pot back on the stove an' Kate can give ye some more when ye want it. I'm goin' down street a minute."

WHEN Mrs. Burr had gone Kate sat down opposite Loudon and locked her fingers under her chin. Loudon steadfastly kept his eyes glued to his plate. Confound the girl! Why must she pursue him in this brazen fashion? Couldn't she realize—but apparently she realized nothing save the importance of her own desires. Man-like, Loudon hardened his heart. Curiously enough, the strictly impersonal tone of Kate's opening remark gave him a distinct feeling of annoyance.

"Isn't Mrs. Burr great?" said Kate.

"Sure," mumbled Loudon.

"And Dorothy, too. I like her an awful lot. She came over to Lil's this morning, and we sewed and gossiped, and had a perfectly lovely time. She—Dorothy, I mean—showed me a new stitch—but, of course, you aren't interested in embroidery. Tell me, how do you like the new job?"

"All right."

"I'm glad. Is Mr. Mackenzie a good boss?"

"Fine. Couldn't beat him—that is—er—yore dad always treated me white."

"I know," nodded Kate, her black eyes twinkling. "Don't apologize. I quarrel with Dad myself sometimes. Tom," she added, her expression sobering, "have you had any news from Farewell lately?"

"Ain't heard a word since I left. Why?"

"I received a letter from Dad to-day. He says there's a warrant for rustling out for you."

"That's good hearin'," said Loudon cheerfully. "I'm one popular jigger in the Lazy River country. They just can't get along without me, can they?"

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"Apparently not. Dad told me to tell you. Listen; it isn't generally known in Farewell or anywhere else in Fort Creek County, for that matter, that a warrant is out for you. It was issued by Judge Allison in Marysville. Block's keeping it as dark as possible."

"Goin' to spring it on me when I ain't lookin', I suppose. He won't try fetchin' any warrant up here, that's a cinch."

"Hardly. I always hated that man."

"I never liked him a whole lot neither. Say, how did yore dad hear about that warrant?"

"He didn't say, but I imagine somebody in Marysville wrote him. He has friends there, you know."

"I didn't know, but I'm sure glad he has. Next time ye write ye might thank yore dad for me."

"I will, of course. I'm awfully glad you're safe up here, Tom. All the straight people in the Lazy River country know you didn't have any hand in the branding of those Crossed Dumb-bell cattle, but that doesn't help much when Block and his friends are in the majority."

"Yo're right, it don't; but I got to go to Farewell anyway in about five weeks."

"What?" Kate's eyes widened with something very like fear.

"Sure," nodded Loudon. "I got a little business to attend to that can't be put off."

"Put it off," begged Kate, stretching out a pleading hand. "Put it off, Tom. You mustn't—you can't go back to Farewell now. Some day everything will be all right again, and then you can go back. But not now, Tom. Your life is much more important than any silly business. Please wait."

"Can't be did," said Loudon with finality. "I just got to go, an' that's all there is to it."

"But, Tom," cried Kate, "don't you understand? They'll—they'll ha-hang you."

"They'll have to catch me first. 'Tain't legal otherwise."

"Oh, how can you make fun? I could cry. I could, indeed. I will, too, in a minute—only, you are fooling, aren't you? You don't really intend to go back."

"I never fool. Dunno how. I'm goin' back, an' if Farewell gets gay, why, I'll just naturally rope that village o' tinhorns an' scatter it over a full section o' land. That'll cure 'em o' gettin' out warrants for peaceable folks, won't it now?"

CHAPTER XV

A HIDDEN TRAIL

A POUNDING at his door woke Loudon in the morning.

"'Lo," he called sleepily.

"Time for yore dinner!" shouted Mrs. Burr through the panels. "It's noon."

"I'll get right up."

"Ye will not. Ye'll stay right where ye are. I'm comin' in."

She entered, bearing a basin and towels.

"There," she said, setting the basin on the chair at the bedside. "There, ye can wash yore own face. Hungry?"

"Some," he sputtered through streaming water.

"That's good. I got a nice steak an' 'taters an' gravy an' hot bread, an' there's a friend wants to see ye."

"Who?"

"Swing Tunstall. He just rode in from the Flyin' M. I'm goin' out there this afternoon. Dunno how long I'll be gone. But ye'll be all right. I done asked Lil Mace to come over here an' live while I'm away. Lil an' Kate an' Dorothy'll look after ye. An' mind ye, do what they tell ye, or I'll make it hot for ye when I come back."

"What's the matter? Anythin' happened at the ranch?"

"Oh, nothin' much—a hundred head o' hosses run off, an' Scotty's got two bullets in him."

"What!"

"Yep. That's why I'm goin' out. Got to look after Scotty. Swing says he ain't hurt bad, an' Scotty *is* tougher'n backleather, but still there'd ought to be a woman there, so I'm elected. No, I can't give ye no details. Ain't got time. Swing will tell ye all he knows. Good-by, an' don't forget what I said 'bout mindin' them three girls, Tom."

She picked up the basin and hastened from the room, leaving the door open. Through the doorway Loudon could see a section of the kitchen, and Kate and Dorothy busy at the stove. But the objects in view did not register any impressions on his shocked brain. Scotty shot! A hundred horses stolen! Here was a grim matter indeed, one requiring instant action, and he was laid up with a sprained ankle. Very arbitrary ladies, the three Fates. Heartily,

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but under his breath, for Dorothy was coming, Loudon cursed his luck.

"Well, invalid," smiled Dorothy, "here's your dinner. Shall I feed you, or perhaps you'd prefer Mrs. Mace or Kate? How about it?"

"I only sprained my ankle," said Loudon, red to the ears.

He was wearing one of the Captain's nightgowns. The middle-aged scrutiny of the mother had not quickened him to the fact that the garment was much too small for him, but under the eyes of the daughter he became burningly self-conscious. The knowledge that Scotty had advised Dorothy to fall in love with him did not lessen the agony of the moment.

"I'll put it on this chair," said tactful Dorothy, partly fathoming the cause of Loudon's distress. "Would you like to see Mr. Tunstall?"

"Sure I would. I didn't know he was here at the house."

"He's camping on the doorstep. I'll send him in. Isn't it awful about Scotty Mackenzie? And all those horses, too. Nothing as bad as this ever happened in Sunset County before."

"It won't happen again. Not right away, ye can bet on that."

Dorothy withdrew, and Swing Tunstall entered. The bristle-haired young man shut the door, grinned toothfully at Loudon, and sat down cross-legged on the floor.

"Howdy, Swing," said Loudon, "why ain't ye chasin' the hoss-thieves?"

"'Cause," replied Tunstall, "Doubleday sent me in to inform the sheriff an' get a doc for Scotty. The doc's on his way, an' the sheriff's due in today from Rocket. All the outfit, 'cept Doubleday an' Giant Morton, are cavortin' over the hills an' far away a-sniffin' to pick up the trail."

"When did it happen?"

"Well, as near as we could make out, after siftin' out all Scotty's cuss-words an' gettin' down to hard-rock, Scotty was shot 'bout eight or nine o'clock in the evenin'."

"How?"

"Says he heard a racket in the stallion corral. No more'n he slips out of the office when he's plugged twice—once in the left leg, an' a deep graze on his head. The head shot is what knocked him out. He said he didn't come to till after midnight. He drug himself into the office an' tied himself up the best he could an' lived offen airtights till we pulled in. He didn't even know any hosses had been run off till after we got back."

"I s'pose he was shot the evenin' of the dance?"

"Sure. Oh, ain't it lovely? While we're chasin' imaginary feather-dusters, the Flyin' M hosses are vanishin'. It sure was a slick trick. The gent that thought up that plan for getting' every two-legged man in the country out of the way is a wizard. I'd admire to see him, I would. I'll bet he's all head."

"He ain't exactly a fool," admitted Loudon, thinking of Sam Blakely.

Certainly the manner in which the horse-stealing had been carried out bore the earmarks of 88 methods.

"They had two days start," observed Swing Tunstall. "Time to ride to old Mexico almost."

"Telescope's a good tracker," said Loudon, and began to eat his dinner.

"None better. But even Telescope can't do wonders. By the trail the hoss-band headed east. Them hosses was over a hundred, maybe a hundred an' fifty, miles away by the time our outfit got started. In a hundred an' fifty miles o' country ye'll find lots o' hard ground an' maybe a rainstorm."

"Rain ain't none likely at this time o' year."

"It ain't likely, but hoss-thieves with a two-day start are in luck at the go-off. An' luck comes in bunches. If they's any rain wanderin' 'round foot-free an' fancy-loose these gents will get it. An' then where's Telescope an' his trackin'?"

WHEN Tunstall had departed in search of diversion and to buy cartridges, Loudon locked his hands behind his head and stared at the ceiling. In his mind he turned over the events of the past few days. He was sure that Sam Blakely and the 88 outfit were the prime movers in the shooting of Scotty, and the stealing of Scotty's horses.

Yet, save that the exceeding cleverness of procedure smacked of Blakely, there were no grounds for suspecting the 88 men. Blakely and his gang were not the only cunning horse-thieves in the territory. There were dozens of others free and unhung. Nevertheless Loudon's instinct fastened the guilt on the 88.

"I'm sure," he muttered, "certain sure.

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But there ain't nothin' to go by. Not a thing. An' ye can't prove nothin' lyin' on yore back with a bumped ankle."

Half an hour later the entrance of Kate Saltoun interrupted his gloomy reflections.

"Feeling worse, Tom?" she inquired, her expression anxious.

"Me? Oh, not a little bit. I feel just like a flock o' birds with yaller wings."

"You needn't be snippy. I know how your ankle must pain you, but——"

"It ain't the ankle, Kate. That feels fine, only I know I can't stand on it. It's what I'm thinkin' about. I was wonderin' 'bout Scotty an' all."

"If I sit with you, would—would you like to talk?" said she with a hesitant smile, the slow red mounting to her cheeks.

"If it wouldn't bother ye too much."

"I'll be right back."

Kate took away the dishes, and Loudon, who had pulled the blankets up to his chin at her entry, snuggled deeper into the bed and wished himself elsewhere.

"What else could I say?" he asked himself dismally. "Lord A'mighty, I wish she'd keep away from me."

Kate returned quickly, carried the chair to the foot of the bed and sat down. She crossed one leg over the other and clasped her hands in her lap. Silence ensued for a brief space of time."

"Well," said Kate leadingly.

"I was just a-wonderin' about this hoss deal," began Loudon. "I think——"

"I know what you intended saying," Kate observed calmly. "You see in it the fine Italian hand of Blakely."

"You always could talk high, wide and handsome," said Loudon admiringly. "How d'je guess it?"

"I know Sam Blakely. That's enough. He'd hesitate at nothing, no matter how vile or wicked it might be. Oh, don't look so eager. I can't prove it. It's my instinct, that's all. I hate him—hate him—hate him!"

Kate covered her face with her hands.

"They'll hear ye in the kitchen," cautioned Loudon in a whisper.

Kate lowered her hands and looked at him wearily. When she spoke her voice was perfectly composed.

"No, they won't. Dorothy's over at Lil's. Don't worry, though. I sha'n't lose control of myself. Something came over me then. I won't do it again."

"Well, you think like I do, but I can't prove nothin' neither. Never have been able to prove nothin' against the 88. Say, does yore dad still believe like he used to about them cows?"

"The Crossed——"

"No, his cows. Them cows that disappeared now an' then."

"I believe he does. He never talks much, you know, and it's sometimes hard for me to tell what he thinks. But I don't believe he suspects the 88. He was very angry when I broke the engagement. I wouldn't give him my reason, and he stormed and stamped around, and quarreled with me all the time. That's partly why I came up here to visit Lil Mace."

"If ye could only wake up Fort Creek County—but them fellahs, most of 'em, are for the 88, an' them that ain't have to take it out in thinkin' a lot. Now if we could cinch this hoss-stealin' on the 88 it would help a lot down in Fort Creek County. The honest folks down there would have somethin' to go on, an' they'd paint for war immediate, an' with the boys from up here it would be a cinch. We'd go over the 88 outfit like a landslide. An' here I am throwed an' hog-tied. Say—" Loudon's mouth opened wide. His eyes shone. In his excitement he raised himself on his elbow—"I got it! I got it!"

"What?" Kate leaned toward him, lips parted.

"It ain't possible that dance was just luck," said Loudon rapidly. "It couldn't just 'a' happened all hunky-dory so that fellah from Hatchet Creek would find all the boys in town. Not by a jugful it couldn't! It was set for that night a-purpose. Now who started the ball a-rollin' for that dance?"

He gazed triumphantly at Kate. Her eyes danced.

"I'll try and find out for you," she said.

"Howdy, folks?"

It was Pete O'Leary who spoke, and he was standing beside the kitchen table looking in on them. Loudon's mouth tightened. How much of their conversation had O'Leary heard?

"Good afternoon, Mr. O'Leary," said Kate, rising and advancing to the doorway. "Looking for Dorothy, aren't you? Oh, I know you are. You'll find her down at Mrs. Mace's. Yes, it's a beautiful day, beautiful. Good afternoon, Mr. O'Leary, good afternoon."

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In the face of this Pete O'Leary departed. Kate went into the kitchen. In a few minutes she returned, laughing.

"He didn't go into Lil's," she said. "He went on toward Main Street. I watched him. He's a nervy individual. Dorothy doesn't like him, and I don't either."

"I wonder if he did come to see Dorothy, or——"

"He came to see me."

"You!" Loudon's surprise was patent.

"Yes, isn't it charming? Turned him out in quick fashion, didn't I? The pest! Dorothy said he clung to her like glue till I came. He's deserted her for me ever since the dance. She baked me a cake. Said it was a reward. She'd never been able to get rid of him. But I'm afraid Dorothy's too tender-hearted. I don't mind being rude. Why, what's the matter?"

"I was just a-wonderin' how much that fellah heard?"

"Oh, nothing," said Kate carelessly. "We weren't talking loudly, were we? Does it make any difference?"

"It sure does. O'Leary's in with the 88, or I'm a Dutchman."

"He is!"

"Sure," Loudon nodded. "I got proof o' that, anyhow."

"Heavens! If he heard what we were saying he'll warn Blakely and the rest. And we can't stop him! We can't stop him!"

"Not yet we can't. I can't, special."

Kate stared steadily at Loudon.

"Tom," said she, after a silence, "if Pete O'Leary is Blakely's friend then Pete O'Leary got up that dance."

"Oh, I'm bright!" groaned Loudon. "I must be losin' my mind. There it was, plain as the brand on a hoss, an' I never seen it. O' course it was him."

"I'll soon find out," Kate exclaimed briskly. "I'll ask Lil and Dorothy and Mrs. Ragsdale and Mrs. Dan Smith. They'll know. Do you mind being left alone for awhile?"

"Not a bit—I mean——"

"Now never mind. I know perfectly well what you mean. Here, I'll put your gun where you can reach it. If you want anything, shoot."

She plumped his pillow, patted and pulled the blankets to smoothness, and was off.

"Ain't it amazin'?" marveled Loudon. "Now if anybody had told me that I could talk friendly again with Kate Saltoun, I'd 'a' called him a liar. I sure would."

Ten minutes later plump Mrs. Mace entered and interrupted a flow of very bitter reflections on Pete O'Leary.

"Well, Mister Man, how's the ankle?" inquired Mrs. Mace brightly. "Now don't look so glum. Kate'll be back before a great while."

"I wasn't thinkin' o' her," was Loudon's ungallant retort.

"Ye'd ought to. I guess ye are too. Ye needn't be bashful with me. I'm Kate's best friend. And I want to tell you right now I'm awful glad the pair of ye got over your mad. It don't pay to quarrel. I never do, not even when Jim Mace comes in all mud without wipin' his feet. Lord, what trials you men are! I don't really know how we poor women get along sometimes, I don't indeed. Want a drink o' water? Ye can't have nothin' else. Mis' Burr said ye couldn't."

"Then I guess that goes as it lays. But I ain't thirsty, an' I don't need nothin'. Honest."

"Yes, ye do," contradicted Mrs. Mace, gazing critically at him. "Ye need your hair brushed. It's all mussed, an' invalids should look neat. Don't start in to sputter. I shan't brush your hair, but I'll tell Kate she's no great shakes for a nurse. Now I think of it, Kate's hair was mussed up some too. H'm-m-m. What ye gettin' red about. No call to blush that I can see. Oh, you men!"

With a significant wink Mrs. Mace whisked kittenishly into the kitchen. Loudon could hear her lifting stove-lids. He perspired freely. The lady's weighty bantering had raised his temperature.

What a world! Scotty urged him to make love to Dorothy. Mrs. Burr advised him to set matters right with Kate. While Mrs. Mace had everything settled. Between the three of them and his other troubles he believed he would go mad.

CHAPTER XVI

KATE IS HELPFUL

AT SIX o'clock Kate returned.

"It took me longer than I expected," she whispered, Dorothy and Mrs. Mace being in the kitchen. "It's just as

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we thought. Our friend, Mr. O'Leary, was back of the dance. He suggested it to Mrs. Ragsdale, and she got it up.

"I don't believe O'Leary heard any of our conversation. He met me down street and smirked and grinned and tried to invite himself up to see me tonight. But I settled him. I said I'd be busy for the next two weeks. Look here, Tom, don't look so worried. If he heard what we said, don't you suppose he'd leave town immediately? Of course he would. He wouldn't dare stay."

"I ain't so sure about that. He's no fool, Pete O'Leary ain't. He knows there ain't no real evidence against him. We only got suspicions, that's all. Enough for us, all right, but nothin' like enough to hang him. No, he wouldn't vamoose right now. That'd give him away. He'll stay an' bluff it through as long as he can. Then again, if he pulls out he ain't no good to the 88 no more. He's needed up here to let 'em know how things are pannin' out. Say, ye didn't let them ladies suspicion what ye was after, did ye?"

"Of course not. I have a little sense. I made my inquiries quite casually in the course of conversation. Don't fret, they won't have a thing to gossip about."

"That's good. I might 'a' knowed ye'd be careful."

With a start he realized he was commending her, actually commending the girl who had once informed him in withering accents that she would never marry an ignorant puncher. Here she was pathetically anxious to execute his every wish. Apparently she had stopped flirting.

As she flitted between his room and the kitchen he looked at her out of amazed eyes. Measuring her by her one-time frivolous and coquettish actions, the new Kate was rather astonishing. Man-like, Loudon began to suspect some trap. The lady was too good to be true.

"Bet she's tollin' me on," he told himself. "I'll ask her again, an' then pop'll go the weasel. No sirree, I know when I'm well off. As a friend, so long as she acts this a-way, she's ace-high, but I'll bet after marriage she'd develop tempers, an' things like that Sue Shimmers girl Scotty told me about. Sure she would. Not a doubt of it. Yessir, single cussedness for Tom Loudon from now on henceforward. I'll gamble an' go the limit, it's got double blessedness backed clean off the table."

Lying in bed was not doing Tom Loudon a bit of good. He was fast becoming priggishly cynical. Which attitude of mind may have been natural, but was certainly abominably ungallant.

Long after the others in the house were asleep Loudon lay awake. His brain was busy fashioning plans for the undoing of the 88 outfit. It suddenly struck him that the guileful O'Leary undoubtedly wrote letters. A knowledge of the addresses on those letters was of paramount importance. It would wonderfully simplify matters.

The storekeeper, Ragsdale, was the Bend postmaster. Loudon knew that Ragsdale was not given to idle chatter. He resolved to take Ragsdale into his confidence.

In the morning, after breakfast, Kate, first making sure that Mrs. Mace and Dorothy were out of earshot, stooped over the bed.

"Tom," she said, "don't you think I'd better find out whether O'Leary writes any letters and, if he does, to whom he writes them?"

Loudon stared at her in astonishment.

"Huh—how did ye think o' that?" he blurted out.

"I don't know. It came to me last night. It's a good idea, don't you think?"

"Sure, it's a good idea. I was thinkin' the same thing myself. But don't ye bother. I'll find out soon's I'm able to get around."

"Don't be silly. You'll be on your back ten days at the least. He may write several in the meantime, and the sooner we know about it the better. Now I can find out very easily. Mrs. Ragsdale, the prying soul, reads the addresses on every letter coming in or going out. None ever escapes her eagle eye. And she's a great gossip. I've only seen her half-a-dozen times, but nevertheless she's managed to give me detailed histories of the private lives of most of the inhabitants. She enjoys talking to me because I never interrupt, so you see how simple it will be."

"But I don't like to use you this a-way," objected Loudon. "Ye've done enough, too much, as it is."

"Nonsense! It will be great fun turning Mrs. Ragsdale's tattlings into useful information. Tattle! Why she even told me how much you approved of me at the dance. According to her story you came and shouted your opinion into her ear. Did you?"

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"I knowed it!" groaned Loudon. "I knowed she'd tell! I only said——"

"Never mind getting red. I didn't mind a bit. I hoped you did like me. I wanted you to."

Here was thin ice. Loudon, pink about the ears, squirmed inwardly.

"I—I," he stuttered; then, with a rush, "yo're doin' too much, I tell ye. I'll see about these letters when I get up."

"No, you won't. I want to, and I'm going to. It's settled, and you needn't argue. I'll go to the post-office right away. After dinner I'll tell you all about it."

"Wait a minute!" cried Loudon, but Kate was gone.

Loudon had little time to reflect on feminine wilfulness, for Mrs. Mace insisted on spending the morning with him. Dorothy helped her spend it. The buzz of their chatter was lulling. Loudon dozed off and slept till Mrs. Mace awakened him at noon.

"Nice way to treat two ladies," sniffed Mrs. Mace. "Nice way, I must say. Here we come in here to entertain ye while Kate's away and ye fall asleep, so ye do. Bet ye wouldn't have fell asleep if Kate had been here. No, I guess not. You'd have been chipper enough—grinnin' and smilin' all over your face. But ye can't even be polite to Dorothy and me."

"Why, ma'am, I——"

"Oh, never mind makin' excuses. We understand. It's all right. Say—" Mrs. Mace stooped down and guarded one side of her mouth with her hand—"say, when's the weddin' comin' off?"

"Weddin'? What weddin'?"

"Oh, yes, I wonder what weddin'. I do indeed. Well, of course ye don't have to tell if ye don't want to. I'll ask Kate. Dorothy—" she straightened and called over her shoulder—"you can bring in Mr. Loudon's dinner. He's decided to stay awake long enough to eat it."

He ate his dinner alone, but he did not enjoy it. For, in the kitchen, Dorothy and Mrs. Mace with painful thoroughness discussed all the weddings they had ever seen and made divers thinly veiled remarks concerning a certain marriage that would probably take place in the Fall.

"Say," called Loudon, when he could endure their chatter no longer, "say, would ye mind closin' that door? I got a headache."

Silence in the kitchen for a brief space of time. Then, in a small demure voice, Mrs. Mace said:

"What was that? I didn't quite catch it."

With elaborate politeness Loudon repeated his request.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Mace, "the door must be left open. Mis' Burr said so. A sick-room needs lots of fresh air. I wouldn't dare close the door. Mis' Burr wouldn't like it."

"She'd scalp us if we closed it during the day," observed Dorothy.

The wretched Loudon could almost see the wink which accompanied this statement.

"But he's got a headache," said Mrs. Mace. "We'd ought to do somethin' for that. Can't allow him to have a headache, Dorothy. You get the towels an' I'll get some cold water. We'll bathe his head for him. That'll fix him up."

"It ain't as bad as all that," denied Loudon. "It's goin' away already. An' I don't want my head bathed nohow. An' I ain't goin' to have it bathed, an' that's flat!"

At this juncture Kate entered the kitchen, announcing that she was starved. Dorothy and Mrs. Mace, both talking at once, asserted that Loudon had a violent headache and would not allow them to alleviate his suffering; that he had been a most troublesome patient and had kept them busy attending to his manifold desires.

"Don't you believe 'em!" cried Loudon. "I ain't done a thing. They been pesterin' me all mornin'. Won't let me sleep or nothin'."

"There! Listen to him!" exclaimed Mrs. Mace. "We did our level best to please, an' that's all the thanks we get. C'mon, Dorothy, let's go over to my house. We ain't wanted now. Your dinner's in the oven, Kate. He's had his. Hope you'll have better luck managin' him than we did. I'd sooner wrangle forty hosses than one sick man."

THE slam of the kitchen door put a period to her remarks. Kate entered Loudon's room, a pucker of concern between her eyebrows.

"Have you really a headache?" she inquired.

"Of course I haven't. But they was botherin' me—oh, I dunno, makin' fool

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remarks an' all like that. Say, did ye find out anythin'?"

"Not much of any value, I'm afraid. But you're the better judge of that. Pete O'Leary writes to only one person—William Archer of Marysville. O'Leary writes to him once a week usually, but for the last month he's written twice a week, and this week he mailed four letters to Marysville."

"Archer — Archer," mused Loudon. "I can't think just now of anybody o' that name in Marysville. But that town ain't such a great way from the 88 ranch-house — not more'n thirty mile at the most. Archer, whoever he is, could easy keep in touch with—with——"

"Don't boggle so over that man's name. You don't hurt my feelings in the least by mentioning Sam Blakely. Yes, he could keep in touch with Blakely very easily. I learned, too, that O'Leary receives letters about as frequently as he mails them. They are all in the same handwriting, and they are all postmarked Marysville. One came for him this morning. Mrs. Ragsdale let me see it, but the handwriting was strange to me. If it had been Blakely's I'd have recognized it. I'll keep in with Mrs. Ragsdale. I'll visit her every time a mail arrives."

"No, it ain't necessary. It's enough to know he writes to Marysville. First thing to do is see Archer, an' find out some of his habits. He's the link between Pete O'Leary an' the 88, that's a cinch."

"Then I really did learn something of value. I *am* glad. I was afraid it wouldn't be worth a very great deal, and I do so want to help you."

"Well, ye sure have, Kate. Nobody could 'a' helped me any better. But don't do no more. There ain't no reason why you should. It ain't a woman's job anyhow."

"Oh, you've said that before. I intend to help you all I can. I'm as interested as you are in the ultimate crushing of the 88 outfit."

"Yes, but——"

"We won't discuss it, please. How does the ankle feel?"

"It's comin' along fine. I want to get up right now."

"Day after tomorrow you can get dressed if you like and sit out in the kitchen for a while. Oh, I know how hard it is to lie in bed, but one can't hurry a sprain. You have a lot of hard work ahead, and you must be in shape to go through with it. Listen—how would it be if I wrote to Mr. Richie of the Cross-in-a-box and asked him to find out about this Archer man?"

"No, I'd rather manage that myself. I'll go to Marysville."

"You can't! Why, the judge who issued that warrant for you lives there! You insist on going to Farewell, and that's madness. But visiting Marysville would be worse."

"Oh, no, it wouldn't. Nobody knows me there. I was never in the place in my life. It'll be a lot safer than Farewell."

"B-but I'm afraid! I know something will happen to you! I know it! I know it!"

"Nothin'll happen," said Loudon, acutely conscious that the situation was getting out of hand.

Presently his worst fears were realized. Kate, genuine misery in her dark eyes, stared at him silently. Her hands were gripped together so that the knuckles showed white. Suddenly she turned sidewise, flung an elbow over the back of the chair and buried her face in her hands. She began to cry softly.

"Oh!" she wailed, her shoulders shaking. "Oh, I love you so! I love you so! And you don't care—you don't care a bit!"

Sobs racked her whole body. She completely lost control of herself and burst into a storm of passionate weeping. To Loudon it seemed that this state of affairs endured for an age, but not more than five minutes elapsed before Kate swayed to her feet and stumbled from the room. She did not close the door, and Loudon could hear her muffled gasps as she strove with her distress.

At that moment it seemed to him that the girl who had called him an ignorant puncher was a wraith of the dim and misty past. Certainly the present Kate Saltoun was a different person. She no longer flirted, she was plainly sorry for what she had done, and apparently she loved him utterly.

No man can remain unmoved while a beautiful woman weeps for love of him. Loudon was moved. He was impelled to call to her, to tell her to come to him. But he hesitated. He was not at all sure that his feeling was any emotion other than pity. He had spent miserable weeks schooling himself to forget his love and her. Now he did not know his own mind, and he could not decide what to do. While he lay

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hesitating he heard the scraping of a chair being pushed back, the sound of her feet crossing the floor, and the slam of the kitchen door.

HALF an hour later Mrs. Mace came in like a whirlwind. She halted in the doorway and surveyed Loudon with unfriendly eyes. She opened her mouth as if to speak, but closed it without uttering a word, flounced back into the kitchen and shut his door. Almost immediately she opened it.

"Want anythin'?" she inquired ungraciously.

"No, thank ye just the same," replied the mystified Loudon.

Mrs. Mace closed the door without comment. It was not opened again till Dorothy brought in his supper. She inquired politely after his health, but he could see that she was displeased with him.

"What's the matter with everybody?" he asked. "What makes Mis' Mace look at me like I was poison, an' what makes you look as if ye had a pain?"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Dorothy severely, and marched out, her back stiff as a rifle-barrel.

"I've done somethin' desperate, whatever it is," he said, addressing the closed door. "I sure have. I might 'a' come to like that Dorothy girl real well—sometime maybe. But I never will now, an' that's no merry jest."

Gloomily he ate his supper. When Dorothy entered to take away the dishes he demanded to know why he should be ashamed of himself.

"Because you should!" she snapped. "I'm not going to bandy words with you! Just wait till mother comes home—just you wait!"

After which ominous utterance she departed. Loudon scratched his head and thought long and deeply.

"Now I'd like to know what I've done," he mused. "Mis' Mace don't like me a little bit, an' that Dorothy girl talks an' acts like I'd poisoned a well or scalped a dozen babies. It's one too many for me. But I'll know about it when Mis' Burr gets home, will I? That's fine, that is. I'll bet she'll explain till the cows come home. Why didn't I go to that hotel? I will as soon's I'm able. This house ain't no place for a peace-lovin' man."

He was rather relieved that Kate no longer came near him. It saved trouble. He did not quite know what he would say to Kate at their next meeting. What could he say? What, indeed? He pondered the question till he fell asleep, having arrived at no conclusion.

Next morning Jim Mace came to see him. Loudon besought Jim to help him move to the hotel.

"What's the matter?" said the surprised Jim. "Don't my wife an' Dorothy treat ye right?"

"Sure they do, but I don't want to bother 'em no more. I'll be better off where I can cuss when I feel like it."

"Mis' Burr won't like it none, yore goin' off thisaway."

"I can't help that—I want to go."

"An' my wife won't like it neither. Lordy, Tom, ye don't know my wife. She'd hit the ceilin' if I was to tote ye down to the hotel."

"Say," exclaimed Loudon, "can't a married man do nothin' without askin' his wife?"

"Not if he knows what's healthy," replied Jim Mace warmly. "I tell ye, Tom, ye'll jump through a hoop if yore wife says so. Oh, ye can laugh all yo're a mind to. Wait till yo're married, an' ye'll see what I mean."

"I'll wait, ye can gamble on that. Will ye help me or do I have to walk there on my hands?"

"I won't help ye a step. Ye don't know what yo're askin', Tom. Honest, I'm sorry, but I wouldn't dare help ye without Lil said I could. Fix it up with her an' I will."

When Jim had gone Loudon swore soulfully, and thought with amazement of the manner in which Jim was under his wife's thumb. If that was the effect of marriage upon a man he wanted none of it. He had no desire to be tied to any one's apron-strings. He wished to be able to call his soul his own. Marriage—bah!

"I want my clothes," he announced to Mrs. Mace at noon.

"Oh, ye do, do ye?" cried the lady. "Well, ye can just want, so ye can! Ye won't get 'em, an' that's flat! An' Jim Mace nor nobody else ain't goin' to help ye down to that hotel. You're a-goin' to stick right here. Jim told me ye wanted to go, an' what I told him was a-plenty. Here ye stay till ye go back to the ranch."

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"But I want to get up. I'm gettin' plumb weary o' stayin' in bed."

"It won't hurt ye a bit. You'll have lots o' time to think over your sins."

"I'll get up anyhow."

"You just try it! I'd sure admire to see ye try it! You ain't goin' to play any fool tricks with that ankle if I have to get Jim an' a few o' the boys to hogtie ye. Tell ye what I will do. Tomorrow, if you'll give me your word not to leave the house till Mis' Burr or I say you can, I'll give ye your clothes an' you can sit in the kitchen."

"I suppose I'll have to," grumbled Loudon.

"You sure will if ye want to get up," stated the uncompromising lady.

"All right. I give ye my word. Lemme get up now. The ankle feels fine."

"Tomorrow, tomorrow—not one second sooner."

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. BURR RELIEVES HER MIND

LOUDON, sitting comfortably in a big chair, his lame ankle supported on an upturned cracker-box, gazed at the world without through the frame of the kitchen doorway. Leaving his bed had raised his spirits appreciably. He rolled and smoked cigarettes and practised the road-agent's spin in pleasant anticipation of the day when he would ride away on his occasions.

He wondered what luck Telescope and the boys were having. Since Swing Tunstall's visit no news had come from the Flying M. Humanly, if selfishly, he hoped that the trailing would meet with no success till he was able to take a hand. His altruism was not proof against his exceedingly lively desire to share in the downfall of the 88 outfit.

He essayed to draw Mrs. Mace and Dorothy into conversation, but both ladies were grumpy, and he gave it up in disgust. He found himself listening for Kate's footstep. Awkward as their meeting undoubtedly would be, his dread of it was wearing off.

But Kate Saltoun did not appear. Loudon was too stubborn to make inquiries, and Mrs. Mace and Dorothy vouchsafed no information. In fact, save to squabble with him, they rarely opened their mouths in his presence.

A week later Loudon, a home-made crutch under his armpit, was able to hobble about a little. Within two weeks he discarded the crutch and, having obtained permission from Mrs. Mace, limped to the corral and overhauled his saddle. That afternoon Mrs. Burr returned. Loudon saw her first and crab-footed to the other side of the corral. The precise nature of his sin was not clear to him, but Dorothy's words had been disquieting. And now "mother" was home.

Like a disobedient small boy Loudon wished to put off the interview as long as possible. But there was no escape for him. Mrs. Burr marched out to the corral and cornered him.

"How's Scotty?" inquired Loudon, affecting an ease of manner he was far from feeling.

"Scotty's doin' very well," said Mrs. Burr, eying him grimly. "He don't need me no more. That's why I'm here. Young man, I ain't pleased with ye. I ain't a bit pleased with ye."

"Why, ma'am, I dunno what ye mean."

"Ye will afore I'm through. Gimme that saddle-blanket to set on. There! Now, Mister Man, I'm goin' to talk to ye like I was yore mother, an' I expect ye to take it that way."

"Sure, ma'am, fly at it. I'm a-listenin'."

"Do ye remember a certain evenin' down at the Bar-S when ye'd just rid in from Farewell with the mail an' some ribbon for Kate Saltoun?"

Loudon nodded.

"Well, Kate asked ye to come out on the porch, an' ye didn't come. Yes, Sam Blakely was there. Yore not comin' at her invite riled Kate. She allowed ye didn't give a hoot for her, an' when Blakely proposed she took him. She was hoppin' mad with you, an' she was bound to teach ye a lesson.

"No, don't interrupt. Wait till I'm through, an' ye can talk all yo're a mind to. Before that evenin' it'd been nip an' tuck between you an' Sam Blakely. An' you was slow. My fathers! You was slow about speakin' yore little piece! Tom, a girl don't like for a man to keep his mouth shut. If he loves her, let him say so. An' you didn't say so.

"Then again, Kate was flattered by Blakely's attentions. What girl wouldn't be? Tom, ye've got to remember a girl's mind ain't built like a man's. She don't

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reason the same way. She can't. Then again, every girl is a coquette. Take the homeliest slabsided critter in creation, an' at heart she's just as much of a coquette as a she-angel with a pretty figger. They can't help it. It's born in 'em like their teeth are.

"An' you men don't take that into account. You think the girl you admire ain't got no right to look at nobody but you, an' that she's got to be all ready to fall into yore arms when you say the word. An' if she don't do these things ye go up in the air like a mean pony an' go cavortin' off sayin','Drat the women!' I know ye. Yo're all alike."

"But, ma'am, I——"

"No time for 'I's' now. Like I says before, ye can talk later. Well, here's Kate Saltoun—pretty as all git-out, an' assayin' twelve ounces o' real woman to the pound, troy. Naturally, like I says, she's a coquette an' don't know her own mind about the boys. None of 'em don't. I didn't. Well, times Kate knows she loves you, an' times she thinks she loves Blakely."

"How did she know I loved her? I hadn't said a word about it."

"My fathers! Don't ye s'pose a woman knows when a man loves her? He doesn't have to tell her. She knows. Well, as I was sayin', she's a-waverin' this way an' that, an' then along comes that evenin' you don't go out on the porch, an' she kind o' guesses she loves Blakely an' she takes that party. Mind ye, she thought she loves him. Kate's honest. She couldn't lie to herself."

"She did when she said I drawed first," said Loudon in a low voice. "I can't get over that, somehow."

"Tom, at the time you an' Blakely was cuttin' down on each other Kate was excited. She couldn't 'a' seen things straight. She told me she thought ye drawed first. I believe her—why can't you?"

"But I didn't draw first."

"I know ye didn't, but I believe Kate when she says she thought you did draw first. That's what I mean. Under the circumstances, ye'd ought to believe her, too. But never mind about that now. You cut stick an' come here to the Bend. An' Kate begun to find out there was somethin' missin'. Somehow, the Bar-S without you didn't seem like the Bar-S. Before ye lit out she'd gotten used to havin' ye around.

"Ye don't miss a saddle, Tom, till ye have to ride bareback. Same way with Kate. She missed ye, an' as every day went by she missed ye more an' more. Then it come to her. She knowed the man she loved, an' that feller was you, ye big, thick-skulled lummox! Oh, if you was fifteen years younger I'd lay ye over my knee an' wear out a quirt on ye for bein' a fool. I never could abide a fool. But ye'll know somethin' before I get through."

"Don't mind me, ma'am."

"I don't—not a bit! I like you, an' I just love that Kate girl, or I wouldn't be a-settin' here now. Well, when Kate knowed her own mind at last, she gave Blakely back his ring, an' that settled him. She wanted you back, an' the only way she could think of to get ye back was to go after ye. So she done it. An' you had to fight with her an' drive her away. She just couldn't wait for the stage. She done hired a buckboard an' drove back to the Bar-S. She made Dorothy an' Lil promise not to tell ye she'd gone. They told me. She wouldn't tell 'em what had happened between you two. But she was cryin' when she left, so don't tell me ye didn't fight with her.

"Lil an' Dorothy guessed it right away, an' they're mad at ye, you bet. Ye've busted Kate's heart, that's what ye've done. Now ain't ye ashamed o' yoreself? Don't ye think ye didn't act just right? Don't ye think ye might 'a' been just a little bit forgivin' when you could see the girl loved ye with all her heart?"

"She said she'd never marry a ignorant puncher."

"I know. She told me about that time in the Bar-S kitchen. Don't ye understand—can't ye get it through yore head that happened *before* she woke up to the fact that you was the only feller on earth?"

"Did she tell ye all this?"

"She did. Pore little girl, she come to me one evenin', an' she was all wrought up. I seen somethin' was the matter, an' I knowed it would do her a heap o' good to get it off her chest, an' I got it out of her little by little. She was sobbin' like a young one before she was through, an' I was a-holdin' her in my arms, an' I was cryin' some myself. She made me promise not to let on to you, but I ain't a-goin' to set by an' see her hurt when a word or two from me can set things straight. It's the first time I ever broke my word, but I don't care. I aim to help her all I can."

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"Say, did she tell ye what Blakely done?"

"No. What did he do?"

"I dunno. She hates him worse'n poison now. He's done somethin', but she wouldn't tell me what."

"He's been botherin' her likely, the skunk! You'd ought to crawl his hump first chance ye get."

"Maybe I will."

"Looky here. I ain't quite through. What did you'n her fight about?"

"Nothin', ma'am. Honest. I'm there in bed, an' all of a sudden she busts out cryin' an' says she loves me, an' then she goes into the kitchen an' pretty soon she goes out—an' she never does come back. Then in comes Mis' Mace an' she acts mighty unpleasant, an' Dorothy acts the same, an' I believe I'd ruther been at the hotel, considerin'."

"I s'pose ye just lay there like a bump on a log after Kate told ye she loved ye."

"Well, ma'am, I—I—what could I do, ma'am? I couldn't get up."

"Ye might 'a' spoken."

"I couldn't think o' nothin' to say, ma'am," pleaded Loudon.

"Well, ye poor tongue-tied galoot! Ye don't deserve no luck, ye don't! Well, I've said my say. I've done all I could. Ye got to do the rest yore own self. But if ye don't go an' do it like a man, then I'm disappointed in ye."

"Did Kate tell Mis' Mace an' yore daughter what she told you?"

"No, she didn't. She only told me."

"Then they took an awful lot for granted. They acted like Kate an' me was in love with each other."

"Well, my land! They could see Kate cared for ye. Anybody with half an eye could see that. Naturally they didn't s'pose ye was actin' like a complete idjit. What ye goin' to do?"

"I dunno."

"Ye dunno! Ye dunno! An' Kate all but goes on her knees to tell ye how sorry she is for what she done! Not only that, but she says she loves ye besides! An' all ye can say is ye dunno. My land! I can't say what I think o' ye."

"But I dunno, I tell ye, Mis' Burr. I wish I'd stayed in Fort Creek County. This here town o' Paradise Bend is sure a hothouse o' matchmakers. First Scotty—then you—then Mis' Mace. Fine lot o' Cupids, you are. Can't let a fellah alone. Any one would think I couldn't manage my own affairs."

"Ye can't. In a case like this ye need help."

"I'm sure gettin' it."

"Which I hope it does ye some good. Now I ain't a-goin' to say another word. I've told ye just exactly what ye needed to be told. Do what ye think best. How's the ankle gettin' along?"

"Can't bear my full weight on it yet."

"No, nor ye won't for a few days. In a week ye can go out to the ranch if ye like. Scotty wants to see ye, but he said special ye wasn't to think o' comin' till ye was all right. Oh, sure, ye'd like to lope right off an' have the ankle go back on ye an' be no good at all while the rest o' the boys are out in the hills. Don't worry, I'll tend to yore interests—an' Scotty's. I'll see that ye don't go."

"I wasn't thinkin' o' goin', ma'am," hastily disclaimed Loudon. "Are Telescope an' the outfit havin' any luck?"

"Not a smidgen. The boys got in just before I left. They trailed the hoss-band nigh onto a hundred miles west, an' then lost the trail near Miner Mountain. A rainstorm did that trick, an' they couldn't pick up the trail again nohow."

"Swing Tunstall was right. He said if there was a rainstorm 'round, them rustlers would locate it."

"They did."

"The outfit ain't quit, has it?"

"They're a-goin' out again. Scotty says he won't quit till he finds his hosses."

LOUDON spent the following week in unobtrusive shadowing of Pete O'Leary. But not once did that young man leave the confines of Paradise Bend. The fellow spent all of his time loafing in the vicinity of the Burr house and playing poker at the Three Card. He may have known that he was being watched. For Loudon's methods were not those of a Pinkerton shadow.

When the time came for Loudon to depart, Mrs. Burr followed him out to the corral.

"Tom," said she, when his horse was saddled, "Tom, I like you an' Kate. I like ye both an awful lot. I'd sure enjoy seein' ye both happy. Forgive her, Tom, an' ye will be happy. I'm an old woman, but I've seen a lot o' life, an' it's taught me that

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love is the biggest thing in the world. If ye've got it ye don't need nothin' else. Don't throw it away. Don't. Now don't forget to remember me to that old reprobate, Scotty Mackenzie, an' tell him me an' Dorothy are comin' out to see him in a couple o' days."

The new Flying M cook, a citizen of the Bend, greeted Loudon with fervor.

"Thank Gawd ye've come!" he exclaimed. "That there Scotty is sure the —— invalid I ever seen! Forty times a day reg'lar he r'ars an' sw'ars 'cause ye ain't arrove yet, an' forty times a day he does likewise for fear ye'll come before yore ankle's all right. Yo're the bright apple o' his eye, Tom. How ye done it, I don't see. I can't please his R'yal Highness in a million years."

"Oh, it's a cinch when ye know how," grimed Loudon. "Where's the outfit?"

"Most of 'em are out with Telescope. Doubleday an' Swing Tunstall are drivin' a bunch o' hosses over to the north range. Mister Mackenzie is a-settin' up in the office doin' like I said."

Loudon went at once to the office. Scotty, propped in an armchair, evinced no sign of the restlessness mentioned by the cook. He shook hands calmly and smiled cheerfully.

"Glad to see ye," he said. "Set down an' be happy. How's the peg? All right, huh? That's good. Me? Oh, I'm pullin' through like a greased fish. I'll be hoppin' 'round jovial an' free in another week or so. About them rustlers, now. I think——"

"Say, Scotty," interrupted Loudon eagerly. "I got a small jag o' news. I dunno what yore plans are, but I'll gamble what I got to say'll make a difference."

"Let her flicker."

For half an hour Loudon spoke rapidly. At the end of his recital the eyes of Scotty Mackenzie were cold and hard and very bright.

"What's your plan?" he queried.

"Go to Farewell an' Marysville. What I find out in them two places will show me what to do next. I'm goin' to Farewell anyhow on my own hook."

"If I say no, would ye quit me now?"

"I'd have to. I got business with a certain party in Farewell. After I'd finished up I'd come back o' course—if ye still wanted me."

"Well, I don't say no. I think ye've hit it. I knowed ye was Opportunity with a big O when I hired ye. Ye've proved it. Fly at it, Tom, an' prove it some more. Get the evidence, an' I'll do the rest. We'll wipe out the 88 ranch, hide, hoof, an' taller. There ain't a ranch in Sunset County that won't help. We can count in the Cross-in-a-box, the Double Diamond A, an' the Hawgpen, in the Lazy River country, too. Oh, we'll fix 'em. How many o' the boys do ye want? I don't begrudge 'em to ye, but go as light as ye can. I still got quite a few hosses left to wrangle."

"Gimme Telescope."

"Is he enough? I can spare another—two if I got to."

"Well, ye see, I was countin' on borrowin' Johnny Ramsay from Jack Richie, an' there's Chuck Morgan o' the Bar-S. I guess I can get him."

"Get him, an' I'll give him a job after it's all over. Wish I could get Johnny Ramsay, too, but he'd never quit Richie. Well, ye sure done noble in findin' out that truck about Pete O'Leary."

"Ye've got to thank Miss Saltoun for that. She done it all."

"Her! Old Salt's daughter! Say, I take it all back. She can come out here whenever she wants. I'll be proud to shake her hand, I will. Well, I did hope it'd be Dorothy, but now I suppose it's Miss Saltoun. Dunno's I blame ye. Dunno's I blame ye."

"As usual, yo're a-barkin' up the wrong stump. I'm gunshy o' all women, an' I don't want to talk about 'em."

"Oh, all right, all right," said Scotty hastily. "How soon can ye start?"

"Right now, soon's I get another hoss."

"Take Brown Jug. He'll tote ye from hell to breakfast an' never feel it. Ye'll find the outfit som'ers over north o' Miner Mountain, I guess. Tell Telescope I want him to go with ye, an' the rest of 'em are to come home on the jump. Doubleday an' Swing have got their hands full twenty times over. First thing I know there won't be a cayuse left on the ranch."

Two days later Loudon and Laguerre rode into Rocket and spent the night at the hotel. The landlord, Dave Sinclair, had an interesting tale to tell.

"Yest'day," said Dave, "Lanky Bob finds Jim Hallaway's body in a gully near the Bend trail. Jim had been shot in the back, an' he'd been dead quite a while. Jim an' his brother Tom have a little ranch

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near the Twin Peaks, an' Tom hadn't missed him none 'cause Jim, when he left the ranch, expected to be gone a month.

"Come to find out, Jim had been ridin' a bald-face pinto. Accordin' to Tom's description that pinto was the livin' image o' the one that friend o' Block's was ridin' the day they come into my place a-lookin' for information. The Sheriff's got a warrant out for that Cutting gent."

"Hope he gets him," said Loudon, "but he won't. He's got too big a start. I'd sure admire to know what he done with my hoss."

"You hoss brak hees laig," stated Laguerre. "Sartain sure dat what happen."

"I guess yo're right," glumly agreed Loudon. "He wouldn't change Ranger for no bald-face pinto less'n the chestnut was out o' whack for keeps."

CHAPTER XVIII

A MURDER AND A KILLING

LOUDON and Laguerre did not ride directly to Farewell. The three months Loudon had given Blakely would not be up for five days. The two men spent the intervening time in the country between the Farewell trail and the Dogsoldier River. Of their quarry they found no trace.

Not at all disheartened, however, they rode into Farewell on the morning of the day set for the meeting. As usual, Bill Lainey was dozing in front of his hotel. They put their horses in the corral, and awakened Lainey.

"Shake hands with Mr. Laguerre, Bill," said Loudon, "an' tell me what ye know."

"Glad to know ye, Mr. Laguerre," wheezed the fat man. "I only know one thing, Tom, an' that is, Farewell ain't no place for you. I've heard how there's a warrant out for ye."

"Is Block in town?"

"Not just now. He rid out yest'day. But he may be back any time. The Sheriff o' Sunset's here. He's lookin' for Rufe Cutting. Seems Rufe's been jumpin' sideways up north—killed a feller or somethin'. The Sunset Sheriff 'lows Rufe drifted south in company with Block. Block, he says he never seen Cutting. Looked like a shootin' for a minute, but Block he passed it off, an' left town 'bout a hour later."

"Well, the Sheriff o' Sunset don't want me," observed Loudon, "an' he's a good fellah, anyway. Guess I'll stick here today, anyhow. Maybe Block'll come back an' make it amusin'. See anythin' of our friend, Mr. Sam Blakely?"

"Sam don't never drift in no more," replied Lainey. "Ain't seen him since I dunno when. Some o' the boys do now an' then, but even they don't come like they useter. Why, last Monday, when Rudd an' Shorty Simms sifted in, was the first time in three weeks that any o' the 88 boys had been in town. Shorty said they was powerful busy at the ranch."

"That's good. It's probably the first time they ever was busy. See ye later, Bill. S'long."

"So long."

"I'll bet they was busy them three weeks," said Loudon, as he and Laguerre walked away. "The evidence is beginnin' to show itself, ain't it?"

"You bet," assented Laguerre, his eyes shining.

Most of the citizens they met regarded Loudon with noncommittal eyes, but a few of the glances were frankly unfriendly. The two men entered the Happy Heart Saloon, there being sounds of revelry within.

On a table sat the Sheriff of Sunset County. He was heartily applauding the efforts of a perspiring gentleman who was dancing a jig. Loudon perceived that the Sheriff, while not precisely drunk, was yet not sober. His gestures were free and his language freer.

There were at least a score of men in the saloon, and they were all Block's close friends. They muttered among themselves at Loudon's entrance. The story of Block's tarring-and-feathering had lost nothing in transmission.

Loudon and Laguerre made their way to the far end of the bar and ordered drinks. With the wall at their backs they were reasonably secure from treachery. The Sheriff of Sunset nodded to the two men from the Bend and continued to shout encouragement to the jigging citizen. Finally, the dancer succumbed to exhaustion. The sheriff slid from the table.

"Well, I got to be wrigglin' along," he said. "See ye later."

"Not yet, Sheriff, not yet," protested a tall man with wolfish features. "Have another drink first. Just one. Step up, gents, step up. Name yore poison."

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"No, not another one," said the Sheriff, but his tone lacked conviction.

He had another, two in fact. Again he started for the door. But the wolf-faced man barred the way.

"Sheriff," he wheedled, "what ye say to a little game? Just one little game. Only one. Ye can't be in such a all-fired hurry ye can't stop for just one."

"I got to get Rufe Cutting," said the Sheriff. "I ain't got no time for poker."

"Now, looky here, Sheriff," coaxed the tempter, "ye'll stand just as much show o' gettin' Rufe right here in the Bend as ye will anywhere else. What's the use o' ridin' the range an' workin' yoreself to death, when ye can stay here cool an' comf't-able?"

"Aw, shut up! I'm a-goin'."

"Well, o' course, if yo're broke——"

"I ain't broke. What do——"

"No offense, Sheriff. No harm meant. None whatever."

"I'll play ye one game an' that's all. C'mon."

The sheriff played more than one game, for he won the first. He continued to win. He thought no more of Rufe Cutting. And he sat with his back toward the doorway. Which position is the most eminently unsafe of any that an officer of the law may assume. Once, during that time, Laguerre suggested to Loudon that they go elsewhere. But Loudon had whispered:

"Wait. There's somethin' crooked here."

So they waited, Loudon watching for he knew not what piece of evil, Laguerre mystified but thoroughly prepared for eventualities. It was noticeable that, excepting the card-players, the men in the room were afflicted with a strange restlessness. They moved aimlessly about; they hitched their chairs to new positions; they conversed by fits and starts. They threw frequent glances toward the doorway.

SUDDENLY it happened.

A squat-bodied man with bat ears appeared on the threshold. As at a signal, the three men playing with the Sheriff flung themselves down on the floor. The hand of the squat-bodied man shot up and forward. A revolver cracked twice, and the Sheriff of Sunset County quietly crumpled across the card-table.

Through the swirling smoke of the discharge two red streaks flashed as the six-shooters of Loudon and Laguerre barked in unison. The squat-bodied man fell forward on his face.

Head and shoulders on the floor of the saloon, his legs on the sidewalk, he lay motionless. Side by side, the souls of the Sheriff and his murderer sped homeward.

The habitués of the Happy Heart unhurriedly deserted their points of vantage against the wall, on the floor, or behind the bar, and gathered about the corpse of the squat-bodied man. They gazed upon the body for a brief space of time, then, one by one, they stepped carefully over it and departed.

"Gents," squeaked the perturbed bartender, "would ye mind goin' out in the street? I—I'm goin' to close up."

"It's only the mornin'," said Loudon. "Why close up?"

"I'm sick. I got indigestion right bad," the bartender explained.

Indeed, the bartender looked quite ill. His complexion had turned a pasty yellow and his teeth were clicking together.

"Ye look right bad," agreed Loudon. "But yo're mistaken about closin' up. Yo're a-goin' to keep open. Telescope, let's get the Sheriff spread out right."

They pushed two tables together. Then they lifted the Sheriff's body and laid it on the tables. They unbuckled the spurs, straightened the limbs, covered the still face with the neck handkerchief, and put the hat over the gaping wound in the chest where the bullets had come out. When they had done all that they could they needed a drink. The shivering bartender served them.

"For Gawd's sake, gents!" he pleaded. "Block'll be here in a minute! Go out in the street, won't ye?"

"Block'll be here," repeated Loudon. "How do ye know he'll be here?"

The bartender began to stutter. His complexion became yellower. Loudon turned to Laguerre.

"Talks funny, don't he?" he observed. "Can't say nothin' but 'I.' "

Reaching across the bar, he seized the bartender by the shoulder.

"Say, fellah," he continued, "how do ye know so much about Block?"

"I—I—I—" sputtered the bartender.

"I thought Block had left town. How do ye know he's back?"

The bartender changed his tune.

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"Ow! Ow!" he yelled. "Yo're hurtin' me! My shoulder! Ow!"

"I'll hurt ye worse if ye don't spit out what ye know about Block an' his doin's."

"He—he—oh, I can't! I can't!" wailed the bartender.

"Block sure has you an' the rest o' these prairie-dogs buffaloed. I just guess yes. Well, ye needn't tell me. I'm a pretty good guesser myself. Telescope, let's you'n me go call on Block if he is around."

"I am you," said Laguerre, and slid through a rear window.

Loudon followed. They hastened along the rear of the line of houses and crouched beneath the window-sill of a small two-room shack at the end of the street. There were sounds of a hot discussion in progress in the front room.

"Guess he's home!" whispered Loudon. "Might as well go in."

Gently they opened the back door, and very quietly they tiptoed across the floor of the back room to a closed door.

"We've got to hurry," a voice was saying.

"Sure," said the voice of Sheriff Block. "You three cover 'em through the back window when me an' the rest come in the front door. Ye know there won't be no fuss if yore fingers slip on the trigger. I'd rather bury a man any day than arrest him."

With a quick motion Loudon flung open the door.

"'Nds up!" cried he sharply, covering the roomful.

Ten pairs of hands clawed upward. There were eleven men in the room. Every one of the lot, save the eleventh man, had the impression that the six-shooters of Loudon and Laguerre bore upon him personally.

The eleventh citizen, being nearest the door and possessing a gambler's spirit, attempted to reach the street. He reached it—on his face. For Loudon had driven an accurate bullet through the fleshy part of his thigh.

"The next fellah," harshly announced Loudon, "who makes any fool breaks will get it halfway beneath his mind an' his mouth. There's a party in the corner, him with the funny face—he ain't displayin' enough enthusiasm in reachin' for the ceilin'. If he don't elevate his flippers right smart an' sudden, he won't have no trouble at all in reachin' the stars."

The biceps of the gentleman of the face immediately cuddled his ears. The ten men were now painfully rigid. They said nothing. They did not even think to swear. They knew what they deserved and they dreaded their deserts.

"Telescope," observed Loudon softly, "s'pose ye go round an' unbuckle their belts. Better go through 'em too. They might carry shoulder-holsters under their shirts. Take the hono'ble Mister Sheriff Block first. That's right. Now, Mister Sheriff, go an stand in that corner, face to the side wall, an' keep a-lookin' right at the wall, too. I wouldn't turn my head none neither. Ye see, I don't guess there'd be no fuss made if my finger should slip on the trigger. It's a heap easier to bury a man than arrest him, ain't it?"

Loudon laughed without mirth. Block's nine friends, murder in their eyes, stared at Loudon. He stared back, his lips drawn to a white line.

"Yo're a healthy lot o' killers," commented he.

The last belt and six-shooter thudded on the floor just as Loudon perceived that the wounded citizen in the street was endeavoring to crawl away.

"Telescope," he said, "I guess now the party in the street would feel a heap easier in here with all his friends."

Telescope marched out into the street and removed the wounded man's gun. Then he seized him by the collar, dragged him into the shack and dumped him in a corner. Meanwhile, Loudon had lined up the nine beltless citizens beside Block against the side wall. They stood, stomachs pressed against the planks, a prey to violent emotions.

"Ye can rest yore hands against the wall," said Loudon kindly, "an' that's just all ye can do."

"Gimme a drink!" gasped the wounded man.

Telescope scooped up a dipperful from the bucket under the table. When the man had drunk, Telescope proceeded to cut away his trouser-leg, and wash and expertly bandage his wound. His work of mercy finished, the efficient Telescope took post near the doorway where he could watch the street.

Loudon seated himself on the edge of the

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table and rolled a cigarette one-handed. A silence, marred only by the flurried breathing of the stuck-up gentlemen, fell upon the room.

"Block," said Loudon suddenly, "where's Blakely?"

Block maintained his attitude of silent protest. Loudon gently repeated his question. Block made no reply.

Bang-g! Block convulsively shrank to one side. The line of citizens shook. Smoke curled lazily from the muzzle of Loudon's six-shooter.

"Block," observed Loudon serenely, "get back in position. That's right. Next time, instead o' shadin' yore ear I'll graze it. Now where's Blakely?"

"I dunno," replied Block in a choked tone of voice.

"Well, maybe ye don't, maybe ye don't. Ain't he at the ranch no more?"

"I ain't been to no ranch."

"I didn't say ye had, did I?" mildly reproved Loudon. "But now that ye've brought it up, where did ye pick up Shorty Simms?"

"What do ye mean?"

"Oh, I'll explain to ye. I always do that. Habit I got. Ye see, Block, yest'day after you an' the Sheriff o' Sunset had a few words ye left town. Today in comes Shorty Simms an' kills the Sheriff—shoots him in the back, which is natural for a killer like Shorty.

"Well, Block, between the time o' yore ridin' away yest'day an' the murder o' the Sheriff today a fellah on a hoss like yores would just about have time to ride to the 88 ranch an' back. O' course the fellah wouldn't have time for pickin' posies on the way, but he could make it by steady ridin'. Think hard now, Block, think hard. Ain't it just possible ye rid over to the 88?"

"No,——ye, I didn't!"

"No? Well now, ain't that curious? I sure thought ye did. Telescope, I think I see a couple o' hosses in Block's corral. Would ye mind ridin' herd on this bunch while I go out an' look at 'em."

Loudon went out into the street. Far down the street a group of men had gathered. Otherwise the street was deserted. Even Bill Lainey had disappeared.

Loudon stopped and stared at the distant figures. They made no hostile motions, but appeared to hold converse with each other. One detached himself from the group and came toward Loudon. He saw that it was his friend Mike Flynn, the one-legged proprietor of the Blue Pigeon Store. The red-headed Irishman, his mouth a-grin from ear to ear, halted in front of Loudon and stretched out his ham-like paw.

"H'are ye, Tom, me lad," he said, giving Loudon's hand a terrific grip. "I'm glad to see ye, an' that the truth. Others are not so glad, I'm thinkin'." He peered through the doorway. "I thought so. 'T'sall right, Tommy, me an' me friends is with ye heart an' soul. Though Farewell don't look it they's a few solid min like meself in the place who are all for law an' order an' a peaceful life. But they ain't enough of us, d'ye see, to get all we want to wunst.

"Still, we can do somethin', so Tommy, me lad, go as far as ye like with Block an' his constituents ye got inside. Put 'em over the jumps. Me an' me frinds will see that they's no attimpts made at a riscue. We will that. Be aisy. If ye have a chance come to the Blue Pigeon. Not a word. Not a word. I know ye're busy."

Mike Flynn returned whence he came. Loudon was considerably relieved by what the Irishman had said. For only ten of the men who had been in the Happy Heart were in Block's shack, and the absence of the others had given him much food for thought. He hastened to inspect the horses in the corral. Inside of three minutes he had resumed his seat on Block's table.

"'Course I ain't doubtin' yore word, Block," he observed, "but one o' them hosses is yore black, an' the other hoss is a gray pony branded 88 an' packin' a saddle with Shorty Simms's name stamped on the front o' the cantle. Both hosses look like they'd been rode fast an' far. Well, Shorty's dead, anyway. You yellow pup, ye didn't have nerve enough to shoot it out with the Sheriff yore own self! Ye had to go get one o' Blakely's killers to do yore dirty work for ye."

"What you say, Tom?" queried Laguerre. "Keel heem un tak hees hair, huh?"

"It'd sure improve him a lot. I got a plan, Telescope. Just wait a shake. Block, where's Rufe Cutting an' what happened to my hoss Ranger?"

"I dunno nothin' about Cutting," mumbled Block.

Instantly Loudon's six-shooter cracked.

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With a yelp of pain Block leaped a yard high and clapped a hand to his head.

"Up with them hands!" rapped out Loudon. "Up with 'em!"

Block, shaking like a cedar branch in a breeze, obeyed. From a ragged gash in the Darwinian tubercle of his right ear blood trickled down his neck.

"Block," said Loudon in his gentlest tone, "I wish ye'd give me some information about Rufe. I'll ask ye again, an' this time if ye don't answer I'll ventilate yore left ear, an' I'll use one o' these guns on the floor here. Ye got to make allowances for ragged work. I won't know the gun like I do my own, an' I may make more of a shot than I mean to. Ye can't tell."

He drew a six-shooter from one of the dropped holsters, and cocked it.

"Where's Rufe Cutting an' my hoss Ranger?" continued Loudon.

"Dunno! I tell ye I dunno!" squealed the desperate sheriff.

One of the two guns in Loudon's hands spoke twice. Groaning, Block fell to his knees, his hands gripping his head.

"Get up!" shouted Loudon. "Get up! It's only yore ear again. I used my own gun after all!"

THEN, both what he had undergone at the hands of Block and the loss of his pet suddenly overwhelming him, he leaped at the crouching sheriff and kicked him.

"You —— murderer!" he gritted through his teeth. "Where's my hoss? Where is he? —— yore soul! What did Rufe do to him? Tell me, or by —— I'll beat ye to death here an' now!"

And, with his wire-bound Mexican quirt, Loudon proceeded to savagely lash the sheriff. Loudon was a strong man. He struck with all his might. The double thongs bit through vest and flannel shirt and raised raw welts on the flesh.

The sheriff writhed 'round and flung himself blindly at his torturer. But Loudon kicked the sheriff in the chest and hurled him, a groaning heap, into his corner. Nor did he cease to thrash him with the quirt. Between blows he bawled demands for news of his horse. Loudon felt sure that Ranger was dead, but he wished to clinch the fact.

"He's gone! Oh, my Gawd! He's gone south!" screamed Block, unable to withhold utterance another second.

Loudon held the quirt poised over his shoulder.

"Ye mean Rufe Cutting?" he inquired.

"Both of 'em! Rufe an' the hoss! They're both gone!"

"Ye mean Rufe has took my hoss away?"

"Yes! Yes! Don't hit me with that again."

Loudon did not know whether to believe the sheriff. It was more than possible that Block was lying to escape further punishment. Loudon stared at him. He made an ugly picture lying there on the floor, his face a network of red welts. His shirt was dabbled and stained with the blood from his wounded ears.

"I was goin' to give ye a chance," said Loudon slowly. "I was aimin' to give ye yore gun an' let ye shoot it out with me. But I can't do that now. Ye ain't in no shape for shootin'. It'd be like murder to down ye, an' I ain't goin' to practise murder even on a dog like you. I'm kind o' sorry I feel that way about it. Ye don't deserve to live a minute."

"You keel heem," put in Laguerre. "She try for keel you een de Ben'. Or I keel heem. I don' care. So she die, dat's enough."

"Can't be did, Telescope."

"I tell you, my frien', you let heem go, she make plenty trouble."

"We've got to risk that. Ye can't murder a man, Telescope. Ye just can't."

Laguerre shrugged expressive shoulders and said no more. It was Loudon's business. He was boss of the round-up.

"Ye see how it is, Block," observed Loudon. "I can't down ye now, but next time we meet it's shoot on sight. Next time ye see Blakely tell him I expected to meet him here in Farewell. I don't guess he'll come now. Still, on the off chance that he does, me an' my friend will stay till sunset. Telescope, I feel sort o' empty. Guess I'll go in the back room an' rustle some chuck."

While Loudon and Laguerre were eating, the sheriff fainted. The strain of standing upright combined with the rough handling he had received had proved too much for him. Laguerre threw the contents of the water bucket over the sheriff.

When the sheriff recovered consciousness Loudon gave the nine citizens permission

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to sit on the floor. And they sat down stiffly.

Slowly the long hours passed. Occasionally Loudon walked to the door and looked up and down the street. Apparently Farewell dozed.

But it was far from sleeping. Here and there, leaning against the house-walls in attitudes of ease, were men. These men were posted in pairs, and Loudon saw Mike Flynn stumping from one couple to another. One pair was posted across the street from the sheriff's shack. The first time Loudon appeared in the doorway these two nodded, and one waved his arm in friendly fashion. There were only twelve in all of these sentinels, but their positions had been chosen with strategic wisdom. Any attempt at a rescue would be disastrous for the rescuers.

"Well," said Loudon when the sun was near its setting, "we might as well be movin', Telescope."

"Mabbeso our hosses been rustle'," suggested Laguerre.

"If they are we'll get 'em back. Our friends here'll fix that up O. K."

The friends glared sullenly. They wanted blood, and lots of it. They had been stuck up and reviled, two of them had been wounded, and their self-respect had been grievously shattered. Vengeance would be very sweet. They wished for it with all the power of very evil hearts.

Loudon gathered up all the cartridge-belts and six-shooters and strung them together. He slung the bundle over his shoulder and addressed his captives.

"You fellahs stand on yore feet. Yo're goin' down street with us. Telescope, I'll wait for 'em outside. Send 'em out, will ye?"

Loudon stepped into the street. One by one the men came out and were lined up two by two in the middle of the street.

The last man was the sheriff. He did not shamble, and he did not keep his eyes on the ground in the manner of a broken man. It was evident that the virtue which passed with him for courage had returned. Even as Captain Burr had remarked, Sheriff Block was not as other men. He was a snake. Nothing but the bullet that killed him could have any effect upon his reptilian nature. This Loudon realized to the full.

"I'm watchin' ye, Block," he said. "My hand ain't none shaky yet, even if I have been holdin' a gun on ye all day."

Block shot him a venomous side glance and then looked straight ahead.

"Git along, boys," ordered Loudon. "We'll be right behind ye."

With Loudon and Laguerre marching on the right and left flank rear respectively the procession trailed down the street till it arrived opposite Bill Lainey's hotel. There, in obedience to Loudon's sharp command, it halted. While Laguerre guarded the prisoners Loudon went to the corral. He found Lainey sitting on a wagon-box beside the gate, a double-barreled shotgun across his knees. Lainey was excessively wide awake.

"Did somebody come a-lookin' in at our hosses?" drawled Loudon.

"Somebody did," wheezed Lainey. "Somebody —— near had both of 'em out the gate, but I had this Greener handy, an' he faded. By ——! I'd sure admire to see any tin-horn rustle hosses out o' my corral. They're fed an' watered, Tom, an' my wife's done ——"

"Yes, Mr. Loudon," interrupted Mrs. Lainey, sticking her lean head out of the kitchen window. "I knowed ye wouldn't have no time to eat, so I just rolled up some canned tomatters an' canned peaches an' some beans an' some bacon an' a little jerked beef in yore slickers. Ain't it hot? My land! I'm most roasted to death. How'd ye like it up no'th?"

"Fine, Mis' Lainey, fine," replied Loudon. "I'm obliged to ye, ma'am. I hope next time I'm in town I won't be so rushed an' I'll have time to stay awhile an' eat a reg'lar dinner. I tell ye ma'am, I ain't forgot yore cookin'."

"Aw, you go long!" Mrs. Lainey giggled with pleasure and withdrew her head.

"Bill," said Loudon, "yo're a jim-hickey, an' I won't forget it. Let's see—four feeds, two dinners. How much?"

"Nothin', Tom, nothin' 'tall. Not this trip. It's on the house. This is the first time I ever had a real chance to pay ye back for what ye done for my kid. Don't say nothin', now. Tom, I kind o' guess Farewell is due to roll over soon. Me an' Mike Flynn an' Piney Jackson, the blacksmith, an' a few o' the boys are gettin' a heap tired o' Block an' his little ways."

"I thought Piney was a friend o' Block's."

"He was, but Block ain't paid for his

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last eight shoein's, an' Piney can't collect, an' now he ain't got a bit o' use for the sheriff. Some day soon there's goin' to be a battle. Downin' the Sheriff o' Sunset just about put the hat on the climax. Folks'll take us for a gang o' murderers. Well, I'm ready. Got this Greener an' a buffler gun an' four hundred cartridges. Oh, I'm ready, you bet!"

Loudon, leading the two horses, rejoined his comrade. The animals were fractious, yet Loudon and Laguerre swung into their saddles without losing for an instant the magic of the drop.

"We got here without no trouble," Loudon observed in a loud tone. "We're goin' back the way we came. We'll hope that nobody turns loose any artillery from the sidewalk. If they do you fellahs won't live a minute."

No shots disturbed the almost pastoral peace of Farewell as prisoners and guards retraced their steps. Opposite the sheriff's shack the convoy began to lag.

"Keep a-goin'," admonished Loudon. "We don't like to part with ye just yet."

The prisoners were driven to where a tall spruce grew beside the Paradise Bend trail, three miles from Farewell.

"Ye can stop here," said Loudon. "We'll drop yore guns an' belts a couple o' miles farther on. We're goin' back to the Bend, an' we'll tell the boys what a rattlin' reception ye give me an' my friend. If ye see Sam Blakely, Block, don't forget to tell him I was a heap disappointed not to find him to-day. So long, sports, yo're the easiest bunch o' longhorns I ever seen."

Loudon laughed in the sheriff's blood-caked face, and set spurs to his horse.

"How far we go, huh?" queried Laguerre, when a fold in the ground concealed the tall spruce.

"'Bout four mile. There's a draw runnin' southeast. We'll ride down that. We'd ought to be at the Cross-in-a-box 'round two o'clock. We could turn off right after we dump this assortment o' cannons. They won't follow us to see whether I told 'em the truth or not. They'll just keep right on believin' we're a-headin' for the Bend hot-foot."

"I guess dey weel. Say, my frien', why deed'n you geet dat warran' from de sher'f un mak heem eat eet? I would, me."

"I don't want to let on I know anythin' about the warrant. Block wants to spring it nice an' easy. All right—let him."

BETWEEN two and three in the morning they dismounted in front of the Cross-in-a-box ranch-house. Loudon pushed open the front door and walked in. He closed the door and set his back against it.

"Hey, Jack!" he called. "Wake up!"

"Who's there?" came in the incisive voice of Richie, accompanied by a double click.

"It's me—Tom Loudon. I want to see ye a minute."

"That's good hearin'. I'll be right out. Light the lamp, will ye, Tom?"

Tousled-headed Jack Richie brisked into the dim circle of lamplight and gripped his friend's hand. He was unfeignedly glad to see Loudon.

"C'mon where it's light," invited Richie. "What ye standin' by the door for? I'll turn the lamp up."

"No, ye won't. Don't touch the lamp, Jack, there's plenty o' light for my business. I'm standin' here 'cause I don't want nobody to know I come here tonight—nobody but you an' Ramsay."

"I see," said Richie. "Want a hoss?"

"No, ours'll do. Yeah, I've got a friend with me. I can't bring him in. Got to be movin' right quick. I just stopped to know could I borrow Johnny Ramsay for a while. It's on account o' the 88 outfit."

"Ye sure can. The 88, huh? Well, I wish ye luck. When ye need any more help, let me know."

"Thanks, Jack. I knowed I could count on ye."

"I'll get Johnny right away."

"No, to-morrow'll do. There's somethin' I want Johnny to do first. I'd like him to ride over to the Bar-S an' tell Chuck Morgan that if he feels like makin' a change there's a job waitin' for him at the Flyin' M. I hate to take one of his men away from Old Salt, but it's root hog or die. I need another man, an' Chuck'll just fill the bill."

"Lemme fix it up. I can borrow Chuck for ye. Old Salt'll listen to me. No, I won't have to tell him nothin' 'bout yore business. Leave it to me."

"All right. That's better'n takin' Chuck away from him. Ye needn't mention no name, but ye can guarantee to Old Salt

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that Chuck's wages will be paid while he's off, o' course. Ye can tell Chuck on the side that Scotty Mackenzie will do the payin'."

"Scotty, huh? I did hear how he lost a bunch o' hosses. How many—two hundred, wasn't it?"

"One hundred. But that's enough."

"Ye don't suspect the 88, do ye? Why, the Flyin' M is two hundred mile north."

"What's two hundred mile to the 88? Didn't Scotty ride it just to find out whether I was straight or a murderer?"

"He sure did," laughed Richie. "Ye couldn't blame the old jigger, though. That 88 brand on yore hoss was misleadin' some."

"That hoss o' mine's been stole. Yep, lifted right in the street in Paradise Bend. Rufe Cutting done it."

"I don't remember him. Is he anybody special besides a hoss-thief?"

"Friend o' Blakely's. Block says Rufe's drifted south—him an' the hoss. But Block may be lyin'. Ye can't tell.

"Did the sheriff give ye that information free of charge?"

"Not so ye could notice it. I got it out of him with a quirt, an' I had to drill both his ears, he was that stubborn."

"Drilled both his ears. Well! Well! Ye'd ought to have killed him."

"I know it. He went an' got Shorty Simms to kill the sheriff o' Sunset."

"What?"

"Sure. It was this a-way:"

Loudon related the circumstances of the sheriff's murder.

"An'," he said in conclusion, "Sunset ain't a-goin' to take it kindly."

"Which I should say not! His friends'll paint for war, that's a cinch. ——, this country's gettin' worse an' worse!"

"No, only the people are, an' maybe we can get some of 'em to change. But I been here too long already. We're ridin' to Marysville, Jack, an' we aim to stay there a couple o' days. Tell Johnny an' Chuck to meet us there, an' tell 'em not to bawl out my name when they see me. It'd be just like the two of 'em to yell her out so ye could hear it over in the next county. An' I've got plenty of reasons for wishin' to be private."

"Don't worry none. They'll keep their mouths shut. I'll fix that up. I wish ye luck, Tom. I sure hope ye get the 88 an' get 'em good. I ain't lost no more cows lately, but I don't like 'em any better for that."

"I wish I could make Old Salt see the light," Loudon grumbled.

"I kind o' think he's comin' 'round. I seen him a week ago, an' he didn't talk real friendly 'bout the 88. But then, he might have had a bellyache at the time. Old Salt's kind o' odd. Ye can't always tell what he's thinkin' inside."

CHAPTER XIX

MARYSVILLE

JUDGE ALLISON, portly and forty, sat on the porch of the Sunrise Hotel in Marysville. The judicial hands were clasped over the judicial stomach, and the judicial mind was at peace with all mankind. However, a six-shooter in a shoulder-holster nudged the judicial ribs beneath each arm-pit. For mankind is peevish and prone to hold grudges, and in order to secure an uninterrupted term on the bench a judge must be prepared for eventualities.

Tied to the hitching-rail in front of the hotel was a good-looking sorrel horse. It bore the Barred Twin Diamond brand. Judge Allison had bought the horse that very morning. He had bought him from the keeper of the dance-hall, Mr. William Archer, who, it seemed, had five others for sale.

Judge Allison was delighted with his bargain. He knew a horse when he saw one, and he felt that he had gotten the best of Archer in the deal. True, as Archer had said, the sorrel was a little footsore, but two or three weeks of light work would cure that.

"Yes," mused the judge, "a good animal. Sixteen hands high if he's an inch, and I'll bet he can run rings 'round any cow-pony in the community. By Jove, here come two unusually fine animals!"

Which last remark was called forth by the approach of two big rangy horses, a bay and a gray. The riders, very dusty, both of them, were hard-looking characters. A week's growth of stubble does not add to the appearance of any one. They were tall, lean men, these two, and one of them was exceedingly swarthy.

They dismounted at the hitching-rail, tossed the reins over their horses' heads

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and went into the bar. Both, as they passed, glanced casually at the judge's sorrel.

"Flying Diamond A," said the judge to himself, eying the strangers' mounts. "I don't believe I ever heard of that outfit. It must be a southwestern ranch."

Judge Allison had never heard of his sorrel's brand, the Barred Twin Diamond, either. But then the judge knew Mr. William Archer, or thought he did, and to question the authenticity of the brand had not entered his head.

The two tall, lean riders would have been greatly pleased had they known of the ease with which the judge read the brands on their horses' hips. It was a tribute to their skill in hair-branding. Pocket-knives in their hands, they had spent hours in a broiling hot draw altering the Flying M to the Flying Diamond A.

On paper it is ridiculously simple. Merely prolong upward, till they meet, the outer arms of the Flying M, and there you have it, a perfectly good Flying Diamond A. But it is quite another story when one's paper is the hide of a nervous horse which frantically objects to having its hair pinched out.

The strangers happened to be sitting on the porch when the judge rode homeward on his sore-footed purchase. They noted how tenderly the Barred Twin Diamond sorrel walked, and promptly retired to the bar and made a fast friend of the bartender.

That afternoon the younger of the two hard-looking characters, the gray-eyed man, became exceedingly intoxicated and quarreled with his swarthy friend who remained quite sober. The friend endeavored to get him to bed—they had taken a room at the hotel—but the drunken one ran away. For a gentleman overcome by drink he ran remarkably well.

He was discovered an hour later in Mr. Archer's corral, making hysterical endeavors to climb the fence, and bawling that he was being detained against his will and would presently make a sieve of the individual who had hidden the gate. To which end he flourished a six-shooter.

Mr. Archer opened the gate and invited the tippler to come out. But this he refused to do, and offered to fight Mr. Archer rough-and-tumble or with knives on a blanket.

Mr. Archer, with an eye to future patronage, did not send for the marshal. He sent for the man's friend. When the swarthy one appeared, the other immediately sheathed his six-shooter, burst into maudlin tears and fell on his neck. Weeping bitterly, he was led away to the hotel and to bed.

"I've seen drunks," observed a plump dance-hall girl, "but I never seen one as full as he is that could walk so good. His licker only seems to hit him from the belt up."

"Oh, there's drunks an' drunks," sagely replied Mr. Archer. "When yo're as old as I am, Clarice, ye won't wonder at nothin' a drunk does."

When the two strangers were in their room with the door shut the younger one lay down on his cot and stuffed the end of a blanket into his mouth. His whole big frame shook with uproarious mirth. He kicked the cot with his boot-toes and bounced up and down. His friend laughed silently.

"Telescope," whispered the man on the bed, when he could open his mouth without yelling, "Telescope, I got it all. They's five hosses in that corral o' Archer's, all of 'em sore-footed an' all branded Barred Twin Diamond. It's done mighty slick too. Ye can't hardly tell it ain't the real thing. An' one of 'em, a black with two white stockings, I can swear to like I can to that sorrel the bartender said the Judge bought. I've rode 'em both."

"—— sleeck work," breathed Laguerre. "I kin sw'ar to dat sorrel too. I know heem, me. He ees six year old, un dat red one I see een de corral, I know heem. I bust heem a t'ree-year old. He ees five now. But de odders I not so sure."

"It don't matter. They're all Scotty's horses. That's a cinch."

"I won'er eef de rest back een de heel. W'at you t'ink?"

"No, they ain't. Why, look here, Telescope, them six sorefoots tell the story. If the rustlers was holdin' the band in the hills they'd 'a' kept the six. But they didn't. They turned 'em over to Archer. That shows they was drivin' 'em, an' drivin' 'em some'ers near here. Well, the railroad ain't more'n fifty mile south. Farewell's about sixty mile north. If them rustlers got the band this far their best move would be to keep right on to the railroad an' ship the hosses East or West.

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An' I'll gamble that's what they've done."

Loudon gazed triumphantly at Laguerre. The latter nodded.

"You are right, you bet," he said, his eyes beginning to glitter. "I hope dem two odder boys geet a move on."

"They ought to pull in tomorrow. To-night, when I'm all sober again we'll go down to the dance-hall an' find out if Archer's made any little out-o'-town trips lately. Telescope, I'm sure enjoyin' this. Tomorrow I'm goin' to make the acquaintance o' the Judge an' see what he thinks o' this rustler Loudon who goes spreadin' the Crossed Dumbbell brand up an' down the land. Yes sir, I sure got to shake hands with Judge Allison."

Again mirth overcame him, and he had recourse to the blanket.

"I wouldn' go see dat Judge," advised Laguerre, with a dubious shake of the head. "She may not be de —— fool. She might have you' face describe', huh. She might see onder de w'iskair. You leave heem 'lone, my frien'."

But Loudon remained firm in his resolve.

MR. ARCHER was a good business man. His two fiddlers were excellent, and his girls were prettier than the average cow-town dance-hall women. Consequently, Mr. Archer's place was popular. When Loudon and Laguerre entered, four full sets were thumping through a polka on the dancing-floor, and in the back room two gamblers sat behind their boxes, players two deep bordering the tables.

After a drink at the bar the two watched the faro games awhile. Then Laguerre captured a good-looking brunette and whirled with her into a wild waltz. Loudon singled out a plump little blonde in a short red skirt and a shockingly inadequate waist and invited her to drink with him.

"I seen ye this mornin'," she confided, planting both elbows on the table. "Ye sure was packin' a awful load. I wondered how ye walked at all."

"Oh, I can always walk," said Loudon modestly. "Liquor never does affect my legs none—only my head an' my arms."

"Different here, dearie. When I'm full it hits me all over. I just go blah. Ye got to carry me. I can't walk nohow. But I don't tank up much. Bill Archer don't like it. Say, honey, what d'ye say to a dance? Don't ye feel like a waltz or somethin'?"

"I'd rather sit here an' talk to ye. Besides, my ankle's strained some. Dancin' won't do it no good."

"That's right. Well, buy me another drink then. I want to get forty checks to-night if I can."

"Help yoreself. The bridle's off to you, Mary Jane."

"Call me Clarice. That's my name. Ain't it got a real refined sound? I got it out of a book. The herowine was called that. She drowned herself. Gee, I cried over that book! Read it six times, too. Here's luck, stranger."

"An' lots of it, Ethel. Have another."

"Just for that ye don't have to call me Clarice. Ye can call me anythin' ye like 'cept Maggie. A floozie named that stole ninety-five dollars an' four bits an' a gold watch offen me once. I ain't liked the name since. Well, drown sorrow."

"An' drown her deep. Say, I kind o' like this town. It suits me down to the ground. How's the cattle 'round here?"

"Nothin' to brag of. They's only a few little ranches. They's gold in the Dry Mountains over east a ways. Placers, the claims are. Bill Archer's got a claim some'ers west in the foot-hills o' the Fryin' Pans. He works it quite a lot, but he ain't never had no luck with it yet. Leastwise, he says he ain't."

"Has he been out to it lately?" asked Loudon carelessly.

The girl did not immediately reply. She stared fixedly into his eyes.

"Stranger," she said, her voice low and hard, "stranger, what do ye want to know for?"

"Oh, I was just a-wonderin'. Not that I really want to know. I was just talkin'."

"Ye seem to enjoy talkin' quite a lot."

"I do. Habit I got."

"Well, what do ye want to know 'bout Bill Archer for?"

"I don't. Say, can't I make a natural remark without yore jumpin' sideways?"

"Remarks is all right. It's yore questions ain't. Stranger, for a feller who's just makin' talk yore eyes are a heap too interested. I been in this business too long a time not to be able to read a gent's eyes. Yo're a-huntin' for somethin,' you are."

"I'm a-huntin' a job—that's all. What do ye take me for, anyway?"

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"I dunno how to take ye. I ——"

"Oh, have another drink an' forget it."

"Sure I'll have another drink, but I dunno as I—Oh, well, yo're all right, o' course. I'm gettin' foolish, I guess."

Her words did not carry conviction, and certainly she did not cease to watch Loudon with furtive keenness. He strove by means of many drinks and a steady flow of conversation to dispel her suspicions. The girl played up to perfection, yet, when he bade her good night, it was with the assured belief that she and Archer would have a little talk within five minutes.

The bar was nearly empty when Loudon and Laguerre entered the hotel. Two drunken punchers were sleeping on the floor, a mongrel under a table was vigorously hunting for fleas, and the bartender was languidly arranging bottles on the shelves. Loudon ordered drinks and treated the bartender.

"Any chance o' pickin' up a stake in the Dry Mountains?" hazarded Loudon.

"How?" queried the bartender.

"Placer minin'."

"Well, gents, if ye don't care how hard ye work for five dollars a day, the Dry Mountains is the place. I never had no use for a long-tailed shovel myself."

"I heard how them stream-beds was rich."

"Don't ye believe it, gents. If they was, there wouldn't be no Marysville 'round here. It'd be all over in the Dry Mountains. No, gents, it's like I says. Ye can get the color all right enough, but ye won't make more'n five a day on an average. Who wants to rock a cradle for that?"

"Don't it beat thunder?" complained Loudon. "Chucked up our jobs with the Flyin' Diamond A 'cause we heard how there was gold in the Dry Mountains, an' come all the way up here for nothin'. It sure does beat the devil!"

"It does, stranger, it sure does. Have one on the house, gents."

"Say," said Loudon, when the liquor was poured, "say, how about east in the foothills o' the Fryin' Pans? Any gold there?"

"Stranger, them Fryin' Pans has been prospected from hell to breakfast an' they ain't showed the color yet. Take my word for it, gents, an' leave the Fryin' Pans alone. Bill Archer's got a claim some'ers over that way an' he goes traipsin' out to it every so often. Stays quite a while, Bill does, sometimes. Don't know why. He don't never get nothin'."

"How do ye know?"

"Stranger, I know them hills. I've prospected that country myself. There's no gold in it."

"Maybe Bill Archer don't agree with ye."

"Likely he don't. He's a hopeful cuss as ever was. Why, gents, only about ten days ago he got back from a two weeks' trip to his claim. A month ago he was gone maybe a week. An' it goes on like that. Why, I'll bet ye Bill Archer spends mighty nigh four months in every year out on his claim. There's perseverance for ye, if nothin' else."

The two friends agreed that it was indeed perseverance and retired to their room.

"We've got Archer pretty nigh hog-tied," murmured Loudon as he pulled off his trousers.

"You bet," whispered Laguerre. "Archer she ees w'at you call de fence, huh? De odder feller dey run off de pony un de cow, un Archer she sell dem. Eet ees plain, yes."

"Plain! I guess so. It'll be a cinch."

It might appear cinch-like, but there were more dips and twists in the trail ahead than Loudon and Laguerre dreamed of.

IN THE morning Loudon strolled down the street and entered the dance-hall. Mr. Archer was behind the bar, and he greeted Loudon with grave politeness.

There was nothing in Archer's manner to indicate that Clarice had talked. In perfect amity the two men drank together, and Loudon took his departure. His visit to the dance-hall had one result. The depth of Mr. Archer's character had been indicated, if not revealed. Loudon had hoped that he was a hasty person, one given to exploding at half-cock. Such an individual is less difficult to contend with than one that bides his time.

Loudon, not wholly easy in his mind, went in search of Judge Allison. He found him in the Sweet Dreams Saloon telling a funny story to the bartender. The judge was an approachable person. Loudon had no difficulty in scraping an acquaintance with him. Half-an-hour's conversation disclosed the fact that the judge's hobby was

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the horse. Loudon talked horse and its diseases till he felt that his brain was in danger of developing a spavin.

Judge Allison warmed to the young man. Here was a fellow that knew horses. By Jove, yes! Reluctantly the judge admitted to himself that Loudon's knowledge of breeding secrets far exceeded his own. In a land where horses are usually bred haphazard such an individual is rare.

The judge took Loudon home with him in order to pursue his favorite subject to its lair. Which lair was the judge's office, where, cheek by jowl with Coke upon Littleton and Blackstone's ponderous volumes, were books on the horse—war, work and race.

"It's astonishing, sir," pronounced the judge, when his negro had brought in a sweating-jug of what the judge called cocktails, "truly astonishing what vile poison is served across our bars. And I say 'vile' with feeling. Why, until I imported my own brands from the East my stomach was perpetually out of order. I very nearly died. Have another? No? Later, then. Well, sir, my name is Allison, Henry B. Allison, Judge of this district. What may I call you, sir?"

"Franklin, Judge, Ben Franklin," replied Loudon, giving the name he had given the landlord of the hotel.

"Any relation of Poor Richard?" twinkled the judge.

"Who was he?" queried Loudon blankly.

"A great man, a very great man. He's dead at present."

"He would be. Fellah never is appreciated till he shuffles off."

"We live in an unappreciative world, Mr. Franklin. I know. I ought to. A judge is never appreciated, that is, not pleasantly. Why, last year I sentenced Tom Durry for beating his wife, and Mrs. Tom endeavored to shoot me the day after Tom was sent away. The mental processes of a woman are incomprehensible. Have another cocktail?"

"No more, thanks, Judge. I've had a-plenty. Them cocktail jiggers ain't strong or nothin'. Oh, no! Two or three more of 'em an' I'd go right out an' push the house over. I'm feelin' fine now. Don't want to feel a bit better. Ever go huntin', Judge?"

"No, I don't. I used to. Why?"

"I was just a-wonderin'. Ye see, me an' my friend are thinkin' o' prospectin' the Fryin' Pans, an' we was a-wonderin' how the game was. Don't want to pack much grub if we can help it."

"The Frying Pans! Why, Bill Archer has a claim there. Never gets anything out of it, though. Works it hard enough too, or he used to at any rate. Odd. About three weeks ago he told me he was riding out to give it another whirl. Last week, Tuesday, to be exact, I was riding about twenty miles south of here and I met Bill Archer riding north. He seemed quite surprised to meet me. I guess he doesn't work that claim as much as he says."

"That's the way we come north—through that country east of the blossom trail."

"Oh, I was west of the blossom trail—fully ten miles west. What? Going already? Why, I haven't had time to ask you about that extraordinary case of ringbone you ran across in Texas. Wait. I'll get a book. I want to show you something."

It was fully an hour before Loudon could tear himself away from Judge Allison. As he crossed the street, a buckboard drawn by two sweating, dust-caked ponies rattled past him and stopped in front of the judge's office. The driver was a woman swathed in a shapeless duster, her face hidden by a heavy veil, and a wide-brimmed Stetson tied sunbonnet fashion over her ears. At first glance she was not attractive, and Loudon, absorbed in his own affairs, did not look twice.

"Find out anythin'?" inquired Laguerre, when Loudon met him at the hotel corral.

"I found out that when Archer came back from that claim in the Fryin' Pans he come from the direction o' the railroad. The judge met him twenty mile south an' ten mile west o' the trail to Blossom. Blossom is almost due south o' here. The next station west is Damson. We'll go to Damson first. C'mon an' eat."

The long table in the dining-room was almost deserted. At one end sat Archer and a lanky person in chaps. Loudon caught the lanky gentleman casting sidelong glances in his direction. Archer did not look up from his plate. It was the first meal at which they had met either the dance-hall keeper or his tall friend.

"I wonder," mused Loudon. "I wonder."

After dinner Loudon inquired of the bartender whether it was Archer's custom to eat at the hotel.

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"First time he ever ate here to my knowledge," said the bartender. "He's got a home an' a Injun woman to cook."

"It's the little tumble-weeds show how the wind blows," thought Loudon to himself, and sat down in a corner of the barroom and pondered deeply.

A few minutes later he removed his cartridge-belt, hung it on the back of his chair and composed himself ostensibly to doze. His three-quarter shut eyes, however, missed nothing that went on in the barroom.

Archer and his lanky friend entered and draped themselves over the bar. Loudon, after a brief space of time, arose, stretched, and yawningly stumbled up-stairs. He lay down on his cot and smoked one cigarette after another, his eyes on the ceiling.

Laguerre wandered in, and Loudon uttered cogent sentences in a whisper. Laguerre grinned delightedly. His perverted sense of humor was aroused. Loudon did not smile. What he believed to be impending gave him no pleasure.

"Guess I'll go down," announced Loudon, when an hour had elapsed. "No sense in delayin' too long."

"No," said Laguerre, "no sense een dat."

He followed his friend down-stairs.

"Seems to me I took it off in here," Loudon flung back over his shoulder, as though in response to a question. "Sure, there it is."

He walked across the barroom to where his cartridge-belt and six-shooter hung on the back of a chair. He buckled on the belt, Archer and his lanky friend watching him the while.

"How about a little game, gents?" suggested Archer.

In a flash Loudon saw again the barroom of the Happy Heart and the sheriff of Sunset County surrounded by Block's friends. The wolf-faced man had employed almost those very words. Loudon smiled cheerfully.

"Why, sure," he said, "I'm with ye. I left my coin up-stairs. I'll be right down."

He hurried up to his room, closed the door and set his back against it. Drawing his revolver he flipped out the cylinder. No circle of brass heads and copper primers met his eye. His revolver had been unloaded.

"Fell plumb into it," he muttered without exultation. "The——murderers!"

He tried the action. Nothing wrong there. Only the cartridges had been juggled. He reloaded hastily from a fresh box of cartridges. He would not trust those in his belt. Heaven only knew how far ahead the gentleman who tampered with his gun had looked.

WHEN Loudon returned to the barroom, Laguerre and the other two men were sitting at a battered little table. The vacant chair was opposite Archer's lanky friend, and the man sitting in that chair would have his back to the door.

"I don't like to sit with my back to the door," stated Loudon.

"Some don't," said the lanky man, shuffling the cards.

"Meanin'?" Loudon cocked an inquisitive eyebrow.

"Oh, nothin'."

"Sure?"

"Positive, stranger, positive."

"That's good. Change seats, will ye?"

The lanky citizen hesitated. Loudon remained standing, his gray eyes cold and hard. Then slowly the other man arose, circled the table and sat down. Loudon slid into the vacated chair.

The lanky man dealt. Loudon watched the deft fingers—fingers too deft for the excessively crude exhibition of cheating that occurred almost instantly. To Archer the dealer dealt from the bottom of the pack, and did it clumsily. Hardly the veriest tyro would have so openly bungled the performance. For all that, however, it was done so that Loudon, and not Laguerre, saw the action.

"Where I come from," observed Loudon softly, "we don't deal from the bottom of the pack."

"Do you say I'm a-dealin' from the bottom of the pack?" loudly demanded the lanky man.

"Just that," replied Loudon, his thumbs hooked in the armholes of his vest.

"Yo're a liar!" roared the lanky one, and reached for his gun.

Archer fell over backwards. Laguerre thrust his chair to one side and leaped the other way.

No one saw Loudon's arm move. Yet, when the lanky man's fingers closed on the butt of his gun, Loudon's six-shooter was in his hand.

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The lanky man's six-shooter was half-drawn when Loudon's gun spat flame and smoke. The lanky one's fingers slipped their grip, and his arm jerked backward. Lips writhing with pain, for his right elbow was smashed to bits, the lanky man thrust his left hand under his vest.

"Don't," cautioned Loudon.

The lanky man's hand came slowly away —empty. White as chalk, his left hand clenched 'round the biceps of his wounded arm, the lanky man swayed to his feet and staggered into the street.

Archer arose awkwardly. His expression was so utterly nonplussed that it would have been laughable had not the situation been so tragic. A thread of gray smoke spiraled upward from the muzzle of Loudon's slanting six-shooter. Laguerre, balanced on his toes, watched the doorway.

Loudon stared at Archer. The latter moved from behind the table and halted. He removed his hat and scratched his head, his eyes on the trail of red blots leading to the door.

"——!" exclaimed Archer suddenly, raising his head. "This here kind o' puts a crimp in our game, don't it?"

"That depends on how bad ye want to play," retorted Loudon. "I'm ready—I'm always ready to learn new tricks."

"I don't just feel like poker now," hedged Archer, ignoring the insult. "I reckon I'll see ye later maybe."

"Don't strain yoreself reckonin'," advised Loudon.

"I won't. So-long, gents."

With an airy wave of his head Bill Archer left the barroom.

Inch by inch the head of the bartender uprose from behind the breastwork of the bar. The barrel of a sawed-off shotgun rose with the head. When Loudon holstered his revolver the bartender replaced the sawed-off shotgun on the hooks behind the bar.

"Well, sir, gents," remarked the bartender with an audible sigh of relief, "which I'm never so glad in my life when Skinny Maxson don't pull that derringer. She's fifty-six, fifty-four that derringer is, the bar's right in the line o' fire—it ain't none too thick—an' Skinny always shoots wide with a derringer. Gents, the drinks are on the house. What'll ye have?"

"Yo're a Christian," grinned Loudon. "Is Skinny Maxson anythin' special 'round here?"

"He's a friend o' Bill Archer's," replied the bartender, "an' he's got—I mean he had a reputation. I knowed he was lightning on the draw till I seen you—I mean till I didn't see ye pull yore gun. Mr. Franklin, that was sure the best exhibition o' quick drawin' I ever seen, an' I used to work in Dodge City. Good thing ye was some swift. Skinny don't shoot a six-gun like he does a derringer. No, not for a minute he don't! But look out for Skinny's brother Luke. He's got a worse temper'n Skinny, an' he's a better shot. This nickin' o' Skinny is a heap likely to make him paint for war. He's out o' town just now."

A clatter of running feet was heard in the street. Through the doorway bounded a stocky citizen, blood in his eye, and a shotgun in his hand.

"Where's the —— —— shot Skinny!" he howled.

"Luke!" cried the bartender, and dived beneath the bar.

"Stranger, I wouldn't do nothin' rash," observed Loudon, squinting along the barrel of his six-shooter. "Drop that shotgun, an' drop her quick."

Loudon's tone was soft, but its menace was not lost on the wild-eyed man. His shotgun thudded on the floor.

"By Gar!" exclaimed Laguerre. "Eet ees——"

"Shut up!" roared Loudon. "I'm seein' just what yo're seein', but there's no call to blat it out!"

For the wild-eyed man was the same individual who had brought the tale of the Hatchet Creek Indian uprising to Farewell. But there was no recognition in the man's eyes, which was not remarkable. Loudon and Laguerre, on that occasion, had been but units in a crowd, and even when they exchanged shots with the fellow the range was too long for features to be noted. Besides, the thick growth of stubble on their faces effectually concealed their identity from any one who did not know them well.

"I'd kind o' elevate my hands, Brother Luke," suggested Loudon. "That's right. Ye look more ornamental that a-way. An' don't shake so much. You ain't half as mad as yo're tryin' to make out. If you was real hot you'd 'a' took a chance an' unhooked that shotgun when ye come in. Brother Luke, yo're a false alarm—like Skinny."

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"Lemme pick up my shotgun, an' I'll show ye!" clamored Luke Maxson, whom the purring voice was driving to a frenzy.

"Ye lost yore best chance, an' chances don't travel in pairs—like brothers."

"Do somethin'! Do somethin'!" chattered Luke.

"No hurry. Don't get het, Brother Luke. If I was to do somethin' yore valuable an' good-lookin' carcass would be damaged. An' I just ain't got the heart to shoot more than one man a day."

Laguerre laughed outright. From behind the bar came the sound of a snicker hastily stifled.

"You let me go," yapped Luke Maxson, "an' I'll down ye first chance I git!"

"Good argument against lettin' ye go."

At the window flanking the door appeared the plump face and shoulders of Judge Allison.

"Why don't ye do somethin', —— ye?" yelled Luke Maxson. "I'm gettin' tired holdin' my arms up!"

"Well," said Loudon, "as I told ye before, though ye can't seem to get it through yore thick head, it's a mighty boggy ford. I feel just like the fellah swingin' on the wildcat's tail. I want to let go, but I can't. If I was sure none o' yore measly friends would shoot me in the back, I'd let ye go get yore Winchester an' shoot it out with me in the street at a hundred yards. But the chance o' yore friends bustin' in sure dazzles me."

"None of 'em won't move a finger!" Luke hastened to assure Loudon.

The latter looked doubtful. The judge coughed gently and rubbed his clean-shaven chin.

"Mr. Franklin," said Judge Allison, "should you care to try conclusions with Mr. Maxson in the street, pray accept my assurances that no one will interfere. I speak unofficially, of course. Furthermore in a wholly unofficial capacity I shall oversee proceedings from the sidewalk. If any one should be so ill advised as to—but no one will, no one will."

"You hear what the judge says?" Loudon cocked an eyebrow at Luke Maxson.

"Sure, sure," said that worthy feverishly. "Lemme pick up my shotgun, an' in five minutes I'll be back in the middle o' Main Street a-waitin' for ye."

"Five minutes is too long," observed Loudon. "Make it three. An' ye needn't touch that shotgun. Ye can get it later—if yo're able."

"Yo're sure in a hurry!" sneered Luke.

"I always am with a coward an' a liar an' a low-down, baby-robbin' road-agent."

At these words rage almost overwhelmed Luke Maxson. Only the long barrel of that steady six-shooter aimed at his abdomen prevented him from hurling himself barehanded upon his tormentor.

"One moment, gentlemen!" exclaimed the judge. "In the interest of fair play permit me to settle one or two necessary preliminaries. The street runs approximately north and south so the sun will not favor either of you. Mr. Maxson will take his stand in the middle of the street opposite the dance-hall. Mr. Franklin will also post himself in the middle of the street but opposite the hotel. The hotel and dance-hall are about a hundred yards apart. I shall be on the sidewalk midway between the two places. At a shot from my revolver you gentlemen will commence firing. And may God have mercy on your souls. Gentlemen, the three minutes start immediately."

"Git," ordered Loudon.

Luke Maxson fled. The judge vanished from the window. Loudon hurried upstairs for his rifle. In the street could be heard the voice of Judge Allison booming instructions to the passersby to remove themselves and their ponies from the range of fire.

"Geet heem, by Gar!" enjoined Laguerre, clicking a cartridge into the chamber of his own rifle. "Geet heem! You got to geet heem! I'm behin' you, me! I trus' dat judge feller, but I trus' myself more. Eef anybody jump sideway at you, I geet heem."

"I'll get him," muttered Loudon. "Don't worry none, Telescope. He'll get it like his brother."

"No, no, Tom, no fancy shootin' at de elbow," exclaimed Laguerre in alarm. "Geet hees hair."

"You just wait. C'mon."

TO BE CONCLUDED.

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The DRUNKEN GOD

by CHARLES J. SULLIVAN

IT IS very foolish to drink anything but boiled water on the island of Palawan. Any man who has been there a week knows that; and Benny Brill had been there for many, many weeks.

Benny Brill was a shave-tail army surgeon, too, a very young man with illusions. Yet, just at the end of the rainy season, we of the barracks began to take turns bringing him in from along the treacherous trails between the hostile barrios or from along the beach.

Once when it was my turn to haul him in, I noticed that he had added a little to his stock of jewelry. This addition also threw some light on the cause of his sudden foolishness.

Since he first came to the island from Cavite he had worn a small gold locket around his neck, beneath his shirt, when that part of his uniform was on his back. In the locket was a girl's picture which I had never seen. Near this, in a pocket sewed on his undershirt, he carried a tiny watch in the case of which there was a thumb-print. He had shown this to me and explained that it was "hers." But he had never worn a ring.

Now, beneath the filth on his hand there gleamed a tiny diamond ring—not a man's ring at all. I said nothing to any one about it, but within a week all hands knew of it, and somehow we were more tender with the young physician.

We felt sure that when the dry days came, Benny Brill would come back to boiled water, but he didn't. The Major threatened to send him to Manila, but I doubt if Benny even heard the reprimand. Next day we didn't find him along any of the trails. We dragged the surf and sounded a gun for him, but he was gone.

A bumboat-man told us of a white man who was living with the natives in the village across the bay. We went to see him, to see if there wasn't a shred of manhood left in him, but there wasn't—not one. The native *cabesilla* had given him two wives and all the *bino* he could drink, which was a lot. They charged him nothing, being proud to have a white medicine-man disgrace himself among them.

We found him abominably, filthily drunk. His clothes clung to him in rags, and he was smeared from hat to leggings in rotten native scum. From beneath the grime of his left hand the tiny diamond twinkled prettily just as, I suppose, there was a spark of good yet lurking in his soul. Around his neck also hung the gold locket, but the watch and the thumb-print were gone.

We left him where he was, and as we tramped back across the hot *cogonales*, we talked of him. We all had liked him, from the bugler to the Major. Still we liked him, but we—well, we didn't respect him. A soldier forgets a man who goes beyond the pale.

Each of us had a tale to tell about the doctor; how he had sat with us through feverish nights; how he had spent days

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explaining the mysteries of flowers and birds and insects; how his books had gone the rounds of the barracks a score of times; how he had helped us in times of court-martial troubles; and how in the last insurrection he had come onto the firing-line with a Krag and his old blunderbus of a shotgun. Yes, we had liked the doctor as one likes an interesting book with a bad ending.

The old Major grunted gruffly when we brought him the news, but said that he felt sure that the doctor would return in a few days. He didn't, however, and when, a week later, we went after him again, he was gone. The villagers were in mourning for him, but could tell us only that he had gone inland several days before. Then we, knowing the temper of the hill people toward all white men, and that the dry season would soon be at its height, smiled in relief and pity, for we knew that Benny Brill had gone to an unknown grave.

THE real dry season did not arrive at its appointed time, which is a bad sign in Palawan. Rain fell intermittently far into May, then when the hot days did come, they brought a famine and a pestilence with them. We along the coast were merely touched by both, and Heaven knows it was bad enough even there! What were the sufferings of the interior tribes would tax the synonyms of horror to describe!

For thirteen hours each day the sun swooped down from the sky and singed everything that walked or crawled or wanted a drink on the island of Palawan. The grass and trees shriveled up, and the wild things came down out of the jungles into the villages, and were unmolested. The dearth of water and food would have been bad, of course, but in connection with an epidemic of dengue the horror was unearthly. Whole barrios were swept away.

We did what we could for those nearest us, and for those who came to us, but what we did without a doctor's directions proved worse than nothing at all. If Brill had been alive and with us he would have insisted upon going into the hills with a sanitary brigade, and we, being neither drunk nor in love, knew that such a thing was impossible.

One morning we awoke to find hundreds of tottering skeletons at our stockade gates. The sun was rolling in a blazing ball down the brown hillside, and some of its fire had gotten into the sea and changed it to sizzling oil.

The host of naked natives on the beach shivered from the very intensity of the heat. There was no sound among them except the constant chorus of low, piteous moans. They were too weak to speak or move, but they begged most eloquently with their eyes. We gave them our breakfast, but as soon as they ate they died. They dropped like flies before a poisonous blast. We refused to feed the others, but they died too, cursing us.

We dug long trenches and rolled the bodies into it and covered them; and others came. Hundreds of others came, faster than they died, because the beach was good for them in comparison to the seething valleys between the hills.

In those next few days I learned why Brill had liked the gugus. There were lovers among them. Their faces were just like the faces of white people when they are sorrowing, and their eyes were just as pitiful. There were men who carried women, and women who carried men or children. There were women with dead children at their breasts, and others with babies who laughed and chattered amid the horror.

After a week we quit. It was too hopeless. We barred the gates and spent our days watching the reeling, stinking throngs. At night we doubled the guard, but the precaution was a mockery. The vast multitude hourly increased, but it spread out over the bosques between the water and the hills, and was very still and peaceful.

At intervals during the nights there came out of the darkness over their heads a low, surf-like rumble, denoting the periods of prayer. Riley, who had served many years on the island, explained that the faithful constantly looked forward to the coming of some deity called Mish. At his appearance the sun would darken, rain would fall even from a clear sky, and the land would be clean and plentiful again.

At sunrise there was always a more impressive ceremony, and most of us in barracks were on hand to see it enacted. It was sad, too. At the instant the fiery ball peeped over the ragged ridge, the vast mass of sick humanity would turn or squirm, or would beg others to turn them, toward the east. Then for a half-minute there would come the low, musical rumble again; then

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silence. Then a sort of wail, then silence, and the long day, and death and misery.

One morning Riley and I were standing together on the ramparts, watching this ceremony, and when I glanced at him afterwards, his face was pale. He spoke before I could question him.

"Serg," he said, "you think this out here is bad, eh? Don't you?"

I nodded.

"It is," he went on. "It's rotten! But, O Lord, if now, today, you could see some of them inland towns. Say, if you could see Ghill today—O Lord!"

"Why?" I asked.

"Rotten!" he grumbled. "Even in normal times the stink would kill a nice man like you or the Major or—Doctor Brill. In '99 I was back in some of them holes in a better season than this. I was with the Leathernecks then. I walked through the streets of Ghill, and I saw gugus asleep on dots of straw that could walk away if it hadn't been satisfied where it was. I saw them with the remains of dead iguanas within six inches of their noses.

"In one place—the cabesilla's, too—I saw the chief asleep on one side of the shack, and his wife and ten children sprawled on the other, and between them, on the floor, a week's garbage. And, oh, the shacks and the streets and the dogs and the cocks and the hogs—bah!"

"Well?" I asked.

"Think of 'em now! Think of 'em down in that oven in the valley of the Pano! Think of 'em piled on top of one another—think!"

I didn't want to think of the valley of the Pano, or of the city of Ghill. I left Riley with his imaginings.

We were worrying. We began to understand that this could not go on forever. We could not bear the stench nor the constant company of death. The Major had long ago cabled to Manila for assistance, and had received curt instructions to act according to the Cebu precedent. I won't record what the Cebu precedent was, but we didn't act accordingly.

AFTER another week our men began to curl up and twist themselves into knots. A dozen of them died. The rest of us got drunk and remained so until the whisky and brandy were gone; then we raided the barrio for *bino*. On the day that this was gone we hailed the nearest tramp by wireless. It answered that it would arrive off Luang shortly after midnight.

We made ready to desert our posts, but we never did. On that next morning the great god Mish appeared!

The long-prayed-for, the hardly expected Mish arrived. It was just at sunrise. We were all up watching the steamer coming slowly between the headlands when the natives as usual began their morning ceremony. We turned to watch them for the last time, as a bedside watcher will bow down to catch the last words of even a dying stranger.

The top of the sun peeped over the ridge, and at once there arose the deep rumble from the thousands of natives below us. We waited for it to rise into the heart-rending wail. Of a sudden the whole vast host surged forward with a great, unearthly shout, then as one man fell face downward to the earth.

We looked toward the ridge and the sun. For the space of five seconds there was an awed silence along the stockade, then some one laughed, then another and another, and I laughed too, though I didn't feel exactly like doing so. And none of us laughed the second time.

Against the sun there was the figure of a man—a tall man. We could not make out how he was dressed, but he wore a field hat at a rakish angle, and at his hip there was a revolver. He seemed to have been pushed on top of the ridge by some one below who was as yet unseen, for he certainly could not have made any climb unaided.

He was drunk. He reeled grotesquely against the white light of the sun, and we could almost imagine that there was a song on his lips. From somewhere about him he produced a colored bottle and held it to his lips, standing in profile to the sun; and then some of us laughed again. He very deliberately put the bottle away again and stood with his arms akimbo, looking down at the great, pitiful sight below him.

He must have spoken, too, for suddenly those kneeling nearest to the ridge arose quickly and ran forward. The stronger carried the weak. Some crawled and others only squirmed through the shriveled cogon grass. Soon those nearest us began to move, and in a few minutes the whole vast throng was moving toward the passes in the hills.

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As the first of the long lines reached the dreaded passes, Brill seemed to become sober quickly. Signaling with his arms for the others to follow, he turned and disappeared behind the rocks of the ridge.

In another instant, however, he was back again. He stood looking toward us. Some one on the stockade waved. The distant figure saluted gravely, then sank below the sky-line again for the last time.

We sent the steamer away. For a week we were busy burying the dead, and still there was no wind, no clouds. We pitied Brill and the tribes he had led to their death. We pictured the whole host already rotting in the ovens between the inland hills, but we knew better than to follow them.

WHEN the cloudy days returned we went inland to burn the villages and bury the dead. After a week we came to the ridge which separates the exterior from the valley of the Pano and the city of Ghill, and we dreaded to cross it. Riley had told the Major of its deathly filth and rottenness. There we knew we would find the body of Brill and his misguided followers.

I think we shall never forget our first view of the city of Ghill. A fairer, cleaner sight, I think, we had never seen anywhere in the Philippines. The great rows of native shacks nestled in the green valley as if they were a part of it.

There were brown natives working in the new fields, there were others, white-robed and turbaned, strutting about the streets; there were playing children, and women scrubbing clothes in the Pano. There were fishermen sitting contentedly along the stream, and afar to the east of the town there was a great fire. About in the center of the village, as in most Luzon towns, there was a large plaza, roofed with countless palms.

After awhile we went down the slope and entered the village. We were quietly received by the natives, or rather we were not received at all, which was better. They did not strew our path with palms, but neither did they flash their bolos and kampilians. In fact, they seemed to have dispensed altogether with weapons of all sorts.

For a moment we half believed that these people were but the ghosts of those who had lived here before the plague, so silent and clean and calm were they. We walked slowly down their spotless street, past their open, whitewashed cabins, until we came to the plaza. It was a new plaza. Sod had not been planted, and the grass had not yet come back to life. The trees, too, showed signs of having been only recently planted.

In the center of almost all heathen barrios there is an idol of some kind. This was no exception. We were attracted to its site by music and the sight of several young girls in an incantatory dance. The idol, too, was new, or rather the upper part of it seemed to have been just completed, though the base was old and weather-beaten. We glanced up, expecting to see a one-eyed god.

But there above us, carved nicely out of a giant red mahogany, was a fair image of a white man. He was not nude, as most gods are, but wore a mantle carved in the likeness of a khaki field uniform, ragged and baggy. On his head was a soft field hat at an ungodly rakish angle, and on his hip was a Colt's revolver, not carved but real. His legs were crossed, and were merged into the pedestal. His arms, too, were crossed on his breast in the manner of a Buddha.

Around his neck there hung a tiny golden chain from which dangled a little locket that glistened merrily in the sunlight. One of the fingers of his left hand was disproportionately smaller than the others, and on it there twinkled a little blue diamond, like a broken bit of sunlight gone astray. The sculptor, either by design or by poor workmanship, had traced a tiny cynical smile on the man's lips, and though his eyes were blank, this smile made him seem to be looking down at the eternal stone.

As we stood there, a little girl with an arm-load of flowers passed by us, bowing. When she came before the icon, she knelt solemnly and strewed the flowers at the base, then bent forward and remained with her head touching the dust. We heard a low rumble behind us, and, turning, we beheld the entire population in a like posture; and they were praying.

Then we heard the sound of the *ahgongs* and the hum of the *gansas*. They came nearer. We backed away to give them room, for we surmised what was going to happen.

A row of dancing girls came first. They spun lightly through the kneeling throngs, and, coming to a halt before the shrine, they

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bowed low and then solemnly began their incantatory dance, while the instruments behind them clanged and hummed and the multitude rumbled in disharmony.

We turned away, still too bewildered to talk. After we reached the farther end of the town, the old Major smiled queerly.

"I guess young Brill is a god now," he said, "in spite of all the missionaries on earth—and I'm for him."

A shave-tail laughed and asked, "Why?"

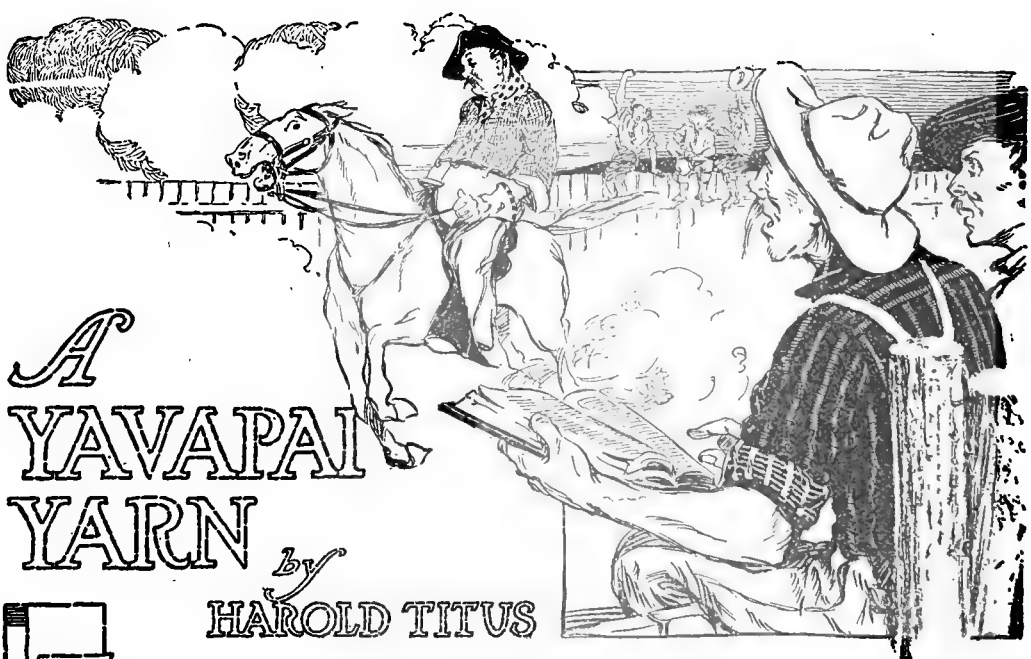
"Why?" bellowed Riley, who knew why better than any one present. "Great guns, man! can't you see why? It's a wonder to me that they didn't try to deify us too! Look back there once; look at that street; look at them houses, the plaza and the trees; look at the clothes and the faces of the people; look at the babies. Who ever saw so many *living* babies in Palawan after a dry season! Look at that fire over there! Do you know what that is for? It burns the town's garbage and dirt. It will never go out. It is Doctor Brill's eternal incense!"

"But what became of Brill?" asked the Major. "I wonder——"

"Brill," said Riley, "was drunk for four months—and in the dry season. He is—well, you saw his ring and the locket and his gat. Brill is dead."

We hiked back to Luang, and there was a report made to Washington. Two months later an official letter came back to us, saying that the department disclaimed all responsibility for the actions of Benjamin Brill after the date of his desertion. We laughed and forgot about it, but Benny Brill continues to be a god, and there are no more plagues or wars or famines in the island of Palawan.

And somewhere in the States there is a girl who is a woman now, who does not know that she had an important hand in the making of a new religion for a people, in the abolition of war and pestilence, and that her diamond ring—or one of them—is on the finger of a god, and that this god is a good god, even though he is made of wood.



A YAVAPAI YARN

by HAROLD TITUS

Author of "An Event," "Furriners."

THE PROFESSOR and Hualpai Sam were admirably suited one to the other. I refrain from attempt to stress this fact because editors have told me that the emphasis of repression is monumental; besides, avoiding dilation saves me thinking up adjectives and looking for synonyms.

The Professor had started south with his paltry band of sheep for cold weather, and

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he might yet be following those meandering mongrels through Arizona, around Williams, in Summer, on the desert in Winter, were it not for the perniciousness of his one vice. But, started for the low country, he camped one night where reclamation service engineers had lived and there found a burro-load of engineering journals. This was the fuel upon which his weakness could feed, for reading was the Professor's peccability. A mild iniquity, on first thought; but—just consider—a wholesome appetite may drift into direst gluttony; a gentle dreamer may develop a stultifying passion for leisure; and an industrious man may work himself to a point of shamefully diminishing returns. So indistinct is the bound between one condition and another!

Assimilation of the printed word is commendable until it overreaches itself. In the Professor's case it overreached until it became a destroying avidity. It destroyed his sheep.

His start was late. He should have hurried, but he remained in the engineers' camp a week, reading the periodicals from cover to union label before rousing from the spell of opportunity to realize that his band was scattered over any amount of country.

He worked five days to gather the flock. Then, with them bunched, bedded and ready for the southward trail again, he unpacked his burro, made a fire, put the coffee-pot on and commenced consumption of the remaining magazines. The coffee boiled dry, the grounds burned up and the pot melted into its component parts. The Professor slept when he could no longer see, and in the morning his sheep were blatting away at a norther that carried stinging snow.

A three-day storm followed, and the sheep divided between cold, coyotes and the Professor. He sold his share to a dry farmer for a hundred and fifty dollars, started on south, lost the hundred and fifty in a poker game at Jerome, climbed over the Black Hills, slid down into Lonesome Valley, and just at sunset of a fine November day punched his burro with its ten pounds of flour, four-bits'-worth of bacon and a copy of Webster's Unabridged up to the cabin of Hualpai Sam at the falls in Lynx Creek.

HUALPAI SAM was a prospector. Almost every one in Yavapai County who plots to avoid exertions is a prospector, and that is no aspersion against the rugged pioneers who sound the mountains of central Arizona for minerals. What I am trying to explain is this: that the million-odd gulches of this hulking precinct all hide more or less gold, so it is no feat at all for an individual who knows the trick to busy himself for a fortnight, wash out a dozen dollars in red metal and take it to Prescott to exchange for beans. Think of the beans that amount of money will buy! That many beans and a roof mean . . .

Well, now you understand why Hualpai Sam lived in his cabin at the falls in Lynx Creek. He could sit and look into his fire and spit occasionally, for weeks at a time. It was nobody's business. Nobody molested him; one drawback—loneliness.

So Sam, hearing the rocks click on his trail, turned on the backless chair, reached for the latch, opened the door and leaned elbows on knees as he strained forward to see and yet keep his feet by the fire.

"Turn him into th' corral an' come in!" called Hualpai.

"Expect I'd turn him loose and sleep out here?" demanded the Professor crossly as he unbuckled the cinch.

Sam threw another oak root on the open fire, relieved his mouth of superfluous fluid and waited.

The Professor entered, flour and bacon in a sack, dictionary under one arm.

"Fine evenin'," judged Sam.

"What's that?" asked the other, indicating an ash-covered volume of imposing proportions that lay on the hearth.

"A book."

"*What* book?"

"Can't tell you," confessed Sam with a shake of his head.

"Can't read?"

"Nope."

The Professor picked up the book and held its worn back to the light of the fire. In faded gilt he read:

NEWTON'S ENCYCLOPEDIA

Ma—Nem.

Immediately he sat down on an empty box, hunched it close to the fire, opened the book at the fly-leaf and commenced to read with the copyright notice.

When day had gone entirely and Hualpai could see a bright star through the one window of the cabin he said:

"Some beans?"

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The Professor scowled and recrossed his knees irritably, then settled nearer to the fire, wet his thumb and turned a leaf.

From time to time Sam threw more wood into the blaze; now and then he spit. At times he would transfer his stare from that vague point beyond the orange flames to the Professor and with lazy eyes study the lean face which bent low against the printed page. Between them no word—just the bump and crackle of new fuel on the pyre, the rustle of book-leaves, the sizzle of tobacco-juice.

The Professor got from Ma to Mea when things fell out of adjustment. He leaned lower over the book, scowling, but progress refused to slip along. The type blurred before his gaze. The page became gray instead of a mellowed white. He looked up impatiently. The fire had waned to a bed of coals and Hualpai Sam was asleep in his chair, idle hands folded on his lax thighs, head forward at an easy angle.

The Professor grunted impatiently, moved past Sam to where the wood had been and found the place barren. He grunted again, yawned abruptly, put down the book with place carefully folded, walked to the lone bunk in a corner, kicked off his boots, got in and pulled the tarp close about his ears.

An hour later Hualpai Sam awoke with a sigh. Ashes covered the coals, goose pimples covered his body. He yawned languidly, walked to the bunk and without so much as unlacing his boots got in beside the Professor. Their breathing mingled until the sun plastered the far hills with its light.

Neither had spoken. Each lay flat on his back, and somehow that spark which leaps from mind to mind told Sam that his guest was awake.

"Gotta get wood," Sam said.

"Get up, then!" rasped the Professor.

He whispered with ominous indistinctness as he laced his boots, and when they went outside he berated Hualpai for his improvidence.

"Lettin' wood get scarce!" he jeered. "With mountains full of it! Ain't that ——?" To his burro, "Ain't that ——, Nellie?"

Two more hours of day had gone when they returned, burro laden with dead limbs and gnarled roots. The Professor tried to drive his animal into the cabin to avoid handling the wood again, he explained, but the pack was too wide. Sam looked on with dumb interest, as if he were an humble guest instead of host.

Over the new fire Hualpai heated the beans and made coffee. Beside it, the Professor sat and began at Mea; he ate with one hand, spilling beans on his book and brushing them away as an absorbed man will unthinkingly wave his hand at impertinent flies.

When the meal was over Sam sat before the fire, looking through it for an hour; then at the Professor for a change. Now and again he spit meditatively.

Such was the beginning. For a week the Professor read, strangely content. No sheep, no wind; a cabin, books, and none to interrupt or intrude by word, look, movement or thought.

The days spun their fabric of eventless history for the two. When hungry they ate; when tired they slept. Otherwise—silence. Once the Professor put his feet in Hualpai Sam's ample stomach and bounced him forcibly on the floor from the bed, when the host had settled himself between blankets for the fourth time with boots on.

"Take 'em off!" the Professor said, turning his face to the wall.

Sam did.

Thrice they essayed to gather wood on the burro. Always Sam took the other's contumely humbly, almost gratefully.

On and on through the closely printed pages the Professor made his toilsome way, checking off every other one, as it were, by a dirty thumb-mark in the lower right-hand corner. Occasionally he recrossed his knees. Once a day, perhaps, he cleared his throat.

Hualpai sat by the fire in the same chair, looking at the flames from the identical angle. Part of the time he sat and chewed and thought; mostly, though, he just sat and chewed—a great, protoplasmic hunk of benign complacency.

Never before had he been so pleasantly situated. He had had partners, but they always insisted on working or complaining or otherwise disturbing his sitting and chewing and infrequent meditation. This man, now, was different. He helped gather the wood, he was unparticular when or what he ate, he asked no questions, did not prattle; he was as content with that book as Sam was with his idle hours. It made no difference what Hualpai did, evidently, so

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long as he took off his boots before going to bed.

Thinking this all over, Hualpai sighed contentedly and took a fresh chew. His cup ran over; nothing attainable remained.

However, even Utopia must have a line-fence. Hualpai came against his with a grunt one morning when he shook the bean-bag empty over the kettle, set the blackened utensil on the fire and announced, with a gesture of a thick thumb from the knot of his folded fingers:

"Them's the beans."

By that time the Professor had finished his volume of encyclopedia, half a copy of *Harper's Magazine* for June, 1897, and was devouring the statistics of the *World Almanac* for 1903. He crossed his knees impatiently and grunted, too absorbed to show more than slight annoyance at the remark. After the pot had commenced to emit sounds which justified belief that the last of the beans were becoming palatable, Sam gestured with the wag of his thumb and said again:

"Them's th' beans."

The Professor looked up sharply, and peppery retort was at his teeth when he read import in Sam's countenance. He folded the corner of a page, placed the book on the floor beside his box and arose.

"Uh—well?"

And replying to that unmistakable though scarcely understandable query, Hualpai took a fresh chew and sighed, by way of preface.

"I s'pose we better wash a little dirt," he said.

"Or else quit eatin'," remarked the Professor.

The Professor laced his boots, which had gone unfastened since gathering wood the day before yesterday, and together they followed the trail up-creek, with its trickle of water and evidence of torrential washings in other months.

SAM carried the shotgun and on the trail he knocked over a jack-rabbit. Surely, without the moral influence of the Professor he would have turned back and let his pick rust and rocker rest cracking in the dry sunlight until at least a portion of the mammal had sustained his leisure, but the man beside him was of a more prudent strain; hours were of little consequence, he remarked; he desired days and weeks for reading. Now that he was interrupted, he must make it worth while.

Hualpai rocked and the Professor dug, and of course it was up to him, a novice at placer work, to strike it. Invariably it is the tenderfoot or the newcomer who makes the rich stake; leastwise, the old Hassayampers swear so.

Anyhow, tiring of digging in the pit Sam had indicated, the Professor moved twenty yards to the right where a tiny wash had been spilling its inconsequential toll of mountain rain-water into the creek for a generation, probably. He filled the rocker with its dirt and the experiment netted what Sam guessed was ten dollars in coarse red dust.

Hualpai, truly in character, was for quitting then and there. But they did not. The Professor said they would not, and beyond that there was no argument, except, perhaps, a bland blink from Sam, telling of his unvoiced disapproval—which, of course, weighed nothing. On the way back to the cabin, with the bottom of a whisky bottle well laid with big red flakes, Sam shot another rabbit, and as the animal kicked his last quirk under an oak brush he blinked again, as if realizing his *faux pas*. With one pot of beans and one rabbit they could subsist only a few meals; now their supplies were augmented by more meat, and Hualpai cherished a slinking suspicion that this new, dominating personality would keep him at work until the last shred of grub had disappeared.

Which he did. On the sixth day they subsided entirely on rabbit—even after the Professor had rationed the beans with exasperating meagerness throughout this unbroken eon of toil. But when they fell into the blankets that night, the whisky bottle was between them, its weight gratifying.

Every step of the way to Prescott was for Sam like those wabbling strides which an exhausted runner makes in the home stretch of his race: each an exquisite agony, and yet every yard bringing him nearer that goal which meant absolute relaxation. For the Professor, each step was impelled by a vigor which can flourish only when the mind is centered about an idea so compactly that it excludes all thought of physical discomfort.

When the man who weighed up the gold said in a matter-of-fact voice, "A hundred and eighty-three dollars and two bits," Sam

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gulped and blinked, as if suddenly visualizing a hundred and eighty-three dollars and twenty-five cents' worth of beans, and their implication of a lifetime of sitting and spitting.

The Professor cleared his throat nervously and presented his hollowed hand for the big yellow disks and the tinkling trickle of silver at the end of the counting. The hands trembled in glad calculation.

Followed discussion, and drinks, and with the drinks companions and gossip; and were it not for the fact that both the Professor and Hualpai Sam stood for something, ever strained toward an ideal—for Sam really strained toward his as ardently, by parallel, as did the Professor—they would never have gotten further.

But as it was, they drove out of town on a hired two-horse wagon loaded with grub: beans—only fifteen dollars' worth, which was Sam's sole cause for dissatisfaction—bacon, a carton of chewing tobacco and approximately two cords of bound volumes, which included the library of a deceased practitioner of medicine which the Professor had seen offered for sale and snatched up eagerly.

Those were the tangible assets. The rest they took back was the right to the remnant of the Y-Bar brand, purchased for fifty dollars, and which ever thereafter occasioned the *Journal-Miner* to note their presence in town as that of "the well-known Lynx Creek stockmen."

It was toward this end—the acquiring of the old brand—that the barroom gossip had shunted them.

"They may be two or three cows left," the Professor argued, "an' a mare or three or four. They're makin' money while you set an' I read. Ain't it a gamble?"

Sam spit and nodded and said that it was. Owning stock bulwarked them. First ranked the cattle, at seasons comparatively easy to handle if they ever needed a dollar again; then the horses which, with strategy, might be corraled and sold. Finally, of course, the creeks, with their frequent nuggets, if beef and broncos failed them utterly.

They stacked the books along one wall of the cabin, the grub along another, hired the teamster to haul wood for two days and began life—Hualpai Sam sitting and spitting, the Professor going through the books one by one, from title-page to last letter, enjoying the luxury of a base-burner, choke-bore reading-lamp after darkness had fallen.

SO FOR a whole year, when once again Sam, in his never-moved chair, wagged a thumb at the sputtering pot and said—

"Them's th' beans."

The Professor looked up in surprise. Aside from mentioning meals and occasionally wood, Sam had not disturbed him for months, it seemed. This was, by virtue of its very rarity, a rude jolt.

"That's th' dust," the Professor remarked in return and drew out a lone silver dollar.

But they were "well-known Lynx Creek stockmen" and had the right of ownership to horses and cattle, so there was no ground for consternation at any inherent elements of the situation. Of course, the placer claim was gone, jumped months ago when they ignored speeding time and let their title run itself out.

"Horses or cattle?" asked Sam.

"Cattle thin — scattered, God knows where," the Professor mumbled, referring to the five cows bearing the Y-Bar which had been discovered during the Summer. Beyond a doubt the offspring of these creatures had already gone the way of unbranded calves. "Horses—down on Lonesome. Better horses," he concluded, which meant that they would avoid the toil of riding rough country for cattle and attempt to gather horses out in the open.

So they rode, after running under obligations to a neighbor who caught two broken Y-Bar horses for them to use.

Lonesome Valley is a huge expanse of lilac-and-purple country where the feed still grows rank in spite of overstocking. Early in the Spring the cattle move out of the oak brush, which keeps them alive in Winter, for the *alfileria*, which appears earliest on Lonesome. But by May the cows have gone away up after the tender white-oak shoots; and, anyhow, the sheep are coming north from the desert to graze Lonesome to its roots. At all seasons, though, horses run there, sticking to the clear country with the persistency of antelope, and out on the flat or up the *malpais*-covered slopes of Old Baldy the Professor and Sam knew that at least a dozen broncos bearing their brand were plucking meat for their ribs.

Sam started the bunch, and the Professor, far ahead, waiting to flank and turn

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the broom-tails up the near side of Baldy and in among the wire fences where capture would be simplified, saw Hualpai's pony stick his nose to the ground as he found a pup-hole, up-end, and fling his rotund rider crashing into the ragged rocks.

Somehow the Professor got him home and commenced nursing Hualpai along, in the manner of mountain men, disdaining to call a doctor though he could lay his two thumbs in the depression of his partner's skull where his weight had found a bearing-point against sharp rock.

II

ROGER McBAIN had, as the rest of the staff agreed, all the brains he could handily use, but was in dire need of a moral gyroscope. That is why his berth with the internes at Post-Graduate Hospital was sacrificed and the young man of medicine went his own alcoholic way. Roger retained the friendship of a few relatives, and when his condition became appealing even to laymen they rushed him to a specialist.

"T. B." the specialist said, and Roger grinned; he had known it all along.

Relatives insisted on climate, and Roger, after consulting a prohibition map, agreed on Prescott, Arizona, for this was in the days when "Whisky Row" still oozed. Arrived, he continued his flirting with John Barleycorn and his first cousin, Old Grim Death.

His system bank-full of bad booze and a clinical thermometer pinned to his vest, Roger McBain began research to determine the effect of violent exercise on a tuberculous patient. He was ejected from the Palace Saloon with a stride that would have made any professional pedestrian seek an alibi, and headed straight for the hills. Five hours later he distinguished, through a wavering vision, the outlines of a log-cabin beside a wash. He reeled down the trail and fell through the door.

When he reopened conscious eyes he was looking at the backs of two men who sat before an open fire. One was lean and long, the other of comfortable plumpness. The thin one sat facing the other, a dish of steaming something in his hands. On his knees rested an open book; about his feet were other books; along the far wall books were stacked as stove-wood might have been. The fuel lay in a pile at the floor center.

"Open your mouth," the gaunt one said, and thrust a dripping spoon in the general direction of his turgid companion's lips.

"Shut it."

A pause.

"Chew."

Another pause—briefer.

"Swaller."

All in a monotone, and on the last command the sequence of abrupt orders began again with the same accompanying mechanics. All the time the pudgy one sat immovable, except that McBain could discern evidence of his jaws' movements at the sides of the thick neck and could see the chin slowly rise and slip back as the man strained over a swallow.

How long it had been going on, he did not know. It continued for minutes after he had awakened, and so odd was the procedure that Roger McBain, racked and drained of strength by his erratic debauch, lost all concern for self.

Then the thin man put the dish to the hearth none too gently, rose, took from a shelf a pound plug of chewing tobacco and thrust it toward the other.

"Bite."

The plump man twisted his neck to adjust his teeth; twisted it again to wrest that upon which he had seized from the remainder of the black strip.

"Chew!"

He put the plug back, flopping into his chair with an annoyed grunt and bringing the book he held to within reading distance.

For perhaps five minutes, silence, except for the softly puffing fire, while the sides of the fat man's neck moved rhythmically as his jaw clamped upon and relinquished the quid. Then the reader wet his thumb, planted it on the lower right-hand corner of the page, held it there a breath while his eyes ran out the last line, flipped it over and in that interval that no words were visible, said abstractedly:

"Spit."

No apparent change in the pudgy one except a momentary cessation of the chewing.

From the fire a sharp *pflus-s-s-s!*

The attenuated man looked up not at all. With a finger he traced the lines of his book slowly. Once he stopped, reached to the

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floor beside him, picked up a battered, flabby dictionary and searched for a word. Finding it, he released his hold on the reference volume and let it slip heavily back to the hearth. When he had finished the second page, he wet his thumb, held it for a pulse-beat on the corner, flipped the leaf and muttered mildly:

"Spit."

Roger removed his gaze and chuckled, silently, at first; then his mirth overflowed the limits of noiseless emotion and his rasping, hard laughter broke in on the soft sounds of the room.

The Professor looked up from his book with a scowl.

"You ain't dead yet," he remarked.

"I was thinking," wheezed Roger, "what would happen if you struck a lot of words you had to look up!"

For an instant the mild blue gaze of the Professor clung to him; then he gestured toward the hearth.

"Coffee," he said, and turned back to his book.

Roger got from the bunk weakly, held his swimming head with his trembling hands and dragged his heavy feet across the rough floor. He looked down at Hualpai, sitting there by the fire, witless eyes straight before him, jaws working slowly, hands folded in his lap with the listlessness of extreme content.

As he stood looking down, the Professor again said "Spit" and Sam spat.

"What's wrong?" asked Roger, indicating Sam.

The Professor looked up, his finger on the place where he had left off, supreme vexation even in the movement of his head.

McBain's eye caught the book page. "Osler's Medicine," he read.

"Are you a doctor?" he asked.

"He hurt his head," answered the Professor.

McBain stirred with his toe one of the scattered volumes. It was Hibbard's "Psychic Phenomena."

"Are you a doctor?" he asked again.

"Fallin' off a horse an' lightin' on a rock," said the Professor.

"Is that all medicine?" with a gesture toward the rack of books.

"He's 'n awful bother," plaintively, with protest in the words, but only dolor in the tone.

Roger gave up the one wonder and turned his attention to the other. As he did so, he forgot all the rest, and a half-hour later, steadied by this new burst of scientific enthusiasm, he declared:

"I saw Waller do that operation at P. and S. just before I came out. Yes—it's the same thing. He's the only man on this side who can get away with it! Jove—out here! Lord, I'd like to see him try it!"

As if weighing the text on psychic kinks, the Professor lifted it up and down.

"An' it says in here, on page 256, about how they ain't afraid of nothin', an' Sam runs off [spit] an' goes over on Granite Creek an' gets tired an' lays down in a cage with a live lynx, an' it don't even look at him. It's 'n awful worry for fear he'll get hurt—he's so trustin' like—an' I have to do everything but breathe for him."

"Jove, what a chance!" Roger muttered, unhearing, and again probed the irregular depression in the skull with his long, lean fingers.

They talked of money and the Professor shook his head.

"A thousand dollars!" he whispered flatly. "We got three cows an' eight scrubby broncs left—nothin' else."

Then, looking at McBain with childlike pathos, he sighed deeply and confided:

"They ain't no peace! I can't read. He sets an' sets, an' I almost have to breathe for him; but if they come to take him to th' 'sylum, I'll run 'em off with a gun, I will! Spit, Sammy," tenderly.

McBain looked long at the unresponsive Sam again and walked about his chair, eyes glowing.

"I'd give my oath on it now, but I'll write Waller today and describe the case," he said. "We'll hear next week. You think—think a thousand dollars—think it *hard!*"

III

PRESCOTT'S Frontier Day is probably the one best bet of all the Western rider-and-roper carnivals. It is a community institution, put on by men who are proud of the place in which they live, and into it they have injected their best efforts.

To make it a big show the organization has combed the Southwest for bad horses; it has snared the worst unbroken beasts that run over *malpais*, and the best riders have been induced to come and try these outlaws.

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From as far as Oklahoma, Montana and the Pacific coast they are enlisted.

Good as the riders were that year, the horses were better, and of the bunch, one stuck out like as ore thumb in the forebodings of every entrant. This horse was named "Rim-Fire" with that breezy Western originality, and for no reason at all.

No concern of ours how, but fact is that Rim-Fire carried the reputation of being a man-killer and, in the vernacular, he "had a crimp" in the men behind the show. Reputations are exasperatingly independent of foundations; those of women and of horses are established in much the same manner. Sometimes investigation of seemingly obvious truths produces enlightening results, but human nature is opposed to investigation as such. We possess an affinity for believing that which we hear.

So the committee in charge of this Frontier Day harkened to the lurid tales of his past and drew the line at Rim-Fire. Out of that array of broncs, plenty of bad horses could be found without bringing in that beast. To maim or kill men was to be avoided at any cost. So general was the protest that the horse was withdrawn, and every one was satisfied.

The big show went on, and after the third day, when the victors were flushed with gold and ribbons and liquor and the stimulus of triumphing before thousands in the stands and three moving-picture cameras in the field, it was something of a shock when this crazy guy, the Professor, well-known Lynx Creek stockman, walked into the most congested institution on Whisky Row, elbowed his way into a knot of winners and remarked:

"World's champ'on! Huh! And the only pitchin' horse in the string unrode!"

They looked at him casually and resumed their Spring and Summer drinking. Obviously an attempt to offend, but they considered the source.

In Arizona an age-old-word couplet runs thusly:

> This ain't nó place for readers and thinkers;
> It shore's a territory for riders and drinkers.

And to the Professor the sentiment expressed therein aptly applied. They knew him, knew that he sat months on end with books about him; knew Hualpai and the relationship between the two. And that was enough. The Professor was without standing among them, just as was his helpless partner. A reader and thinker; but why? What good all that assimilation of knowledge? Using it might have been the foundation of an excuse, but it was never put to use. Their own reading was limited to the perusal of mail-order-house catalogues. That was enough; to carry it further became a vice, just like being caught stealing calves.

So they ignored the Professor and his sally. They were men of momentous affairs, forming a focal point for the eyes of their world, and it devolved upon them to maintain a dignity.

But they were incapable, for the Professor persisted:

"World's champ'ons and all scairt of one horse—one!" holding up a grimed forefinger.

That really demanded something, because the digit was thrust close to their noses in turn. So one of them with intense superiority informed:

"He was ruled out by th' committee."

The Professor shook his head, half in disgust, half in regret, and shook the hand to produce a muffled clinking; whistled a tuneless bar while one of the group looked at him, then to a companion with a half-puzzled expression in his eyes:

"Tch! Tch! Too bad, too bad! Never another chance."

Then they turned stomachs again to the bar and the Professor elbowed unthinkingly among them, a sad, sad drooping of his shoulders and the continued shaking of his head.

They had commenced to talk among themselves, trying to impress this intruder that they were apart from him though their bodies pressed his.

"I sure would like to had him up! I sure would like to have him ride that Rim-Fire hoss—so I could gamble. Easy money—unearned increment."

The shake of the closed hand with its metallic clinking, again.

And that broke the tenure of inebriation. They might have a dignity to maintain, but no living man wants a thing harder than he wants more, and in that particular group was over three thousand dollars in prize money. With the sound of jingling money and that inferred assurance from the Professor, all the avarice of civilized humans welled within them. They left fresh drinks untouched as the mask of unconcern fell away.

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"What's that?" demanded the man with the world's champion bronco-buster medal on his silk shirt.

I said: "Too bad I missed my chance," absently, eyes staring at nothing. Then, straightening, "You see, I'd like to gamble a little he can be rode."

Hesitation for an instant. Then, feelingly:

"Mebby 'tain't too late. By who?"

A crowd was pressing in.

"Oh—by a man in this county."

A man in this county! Restraint was gone; nothing ominous about this offered bet. No, no! Oh, boys, come and take this child's pretty yellow playthings! Why, right there before the Professor was the pick of Yavapai's riders, men who knew every other man of staying ability in their country.

"An' handle him alone without any herders," said the Professor, blinking and shaking his hand again to make the twenties clink above the rumble of chiding voices.

Some one reached into his pocket for a fistful of yellow money and asked:

"How much yah got?"

"An' ride straight up, whippin' and whoopin', two hundred an' twenty dollars," the Professor said, slapping the heap of metal on the bar and covering it with his cupped hand—all that was left of the Y-Bar after paying a man to gather the cows and horses.

"Oh, lemme have some of it! Five to one, old timer!"

And some one else who wanted more, cried:

"Sin, sin! I hate to do it, but I guess seven against your one dollar!"

And finally, amid an uproar, the proprietor of the establishment solemnly wrote down the terms of the wager—two hundred and twenty dollars against twenty-two hundred dollars that a resident of Yavapai County, known to them all, would saddle and ride Rim-Fire according to the terms of the Frontier Day rules.

IV

MORNING came, crystal clear, a sky as blue and as brittle-looking as a robin's egg, distilled sunlight and a gentle breeze off the cool mountains.

Out at the fair grounds Frontier Day echoed. Along the fences perched big-hatted, garrulous men. The percentage of intoxication ran reasonably high; broad jocularity was the rule. They were to witness a crazy test whereon hung money, and the excitement engendered by anticipating the sight of an unduly positive-minded man let down rudely and augmented by that attendant upon the gambling spirit ran high.

They came—McBain, the Professor and Hualpai Sam.

"Where's your rider?" taunted the man who had invested heaviest in the pool.

The Professor jerked his thumb absently toward Sam.

The other took off his hat and fanned himself in mock horror.

"Hualpai Sam, who's clean *loco*, is this here champeen!" he falsettoed, and the others roared.

They swarmed up the pen fence wherein waited the burr-festooned Rim-Fire, ears back on his neck, white-ringed eyes rolling, upper lip wrinkled and quivering as he stood, a victim of temperament. He surely looked the part, and looks always count about nine.

A saddle and hackamore were brought.

"Sam, pick 'em up," said the Professor, and Sam picked them up.

The Professor opened the gate of the pen.

"Go in."

Sam went in.

"Saddle him up."

Collectively the crowd held respiratory organs passive while the ample figure lumbered into the pen with his riding accouterments. He was not even going to saddle in a chute!

The lone horse stood in his tracks, nose down and out, sniffing lingeringly. The ears were erect, the nose had ceased to wrinkle, the white of his eye was no longer in ominous evidence. Wicked rage had departed; frank curiosity was the characteristic which had come to replace hate.

But Sam stood, head hung, as if he saw nothing. His jaws worked laboriously. After a moment some one snickered.

"Saddle up," the Professor said again from his vantage-point on the fence.

Sam remained motionless, except for his jaws. The snickering spread and swelled.

"Spit!" cried the Professor, a mingling of concern; apology and relief in the tone.

Sam did.

"Saddle up."

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And Hualpai moved forward. Twice Rim-Fire circled the pen, snorting softly, trotting slowly. Then Sam, witless-eyed, automatically grasped the tangled forelock with a fat hand, and the man-killer stood still. The crowd cursed its amazement softly. The hackamore went over the ears, the saddle was heaved into place, the cinch was drawn tight. All the time the beast stood there, smelling Sam in mild astonishment.

"Get on," from the Professor.

Sam clambered on, left hand on the horn, right clamped over the cantle. The gate swung open and Sam rode through the chute, immobile of countenance, jaws working regularly, slouched in the saddle, rusty spurs dangling loosely against the thick hair of the bronco.

"Spur in the shoulder, Sam."

The horse threw up his nose and whirled in a quarter turn as the rowels bit home. The crowd gasped; but Rim-Fire did not buck.

"Scratch behind the cinch."

The animal tossed his head again and ran sideways.

Off twenty yards, Rim-Fire started to trot. He went a few paces so, broke into a gentle lope, turned slowly, came back and, where wisps of hay had been scattered on the trampled grass, lowered his head with a sigh and nibbled.

The spirit of the crowd was that each should be fluently damned.

The Professor, sitting beside Roger McBain, was reading aloud from a book, tracing the lines with his fingers:

> When the functions of these centers are impaired, it is often found that primary emotions are absent. Thus is explained the fact that mentally deficient individuals, unnaturally devoid of subjective fear, have been known to go unharmed in cages of ferocious wild animals.

"See?" he demanded mildly, closing the book. "It's just what——"

"Jove, what a chance!" McBain muttered, his deep eyes alight with professional zeal.

"Say, Professor, we've just fifty minutes to catch the train that connects with the Limited. Get your money, I'll wire Waller and we'll be on our way."

V

EIGHT weeks later.

The Professor, with the second volume of a brand-new encyclopedia propped on his lap, faced the fire. In his chair sat Sam, gaze penetrating the depths of the flames. His hair was coming out again where it had been shaved close, and the depression in his skull had given way to a neat scar. His hands were folded on his fat thighs, his jaws worked regularly and on his face was a glowing peace which approached that of reconciliation with all life.

The Professor wet his thumb, placed it on the lower right-hand corner of the page, held it there an instant, flipped the thin leaf and muttered absorbedly:

"Spit."

A cloud passed over the tranquillity of Hualpai Sam's countenance and he stirred his big bulk with the abruptness of irritation.

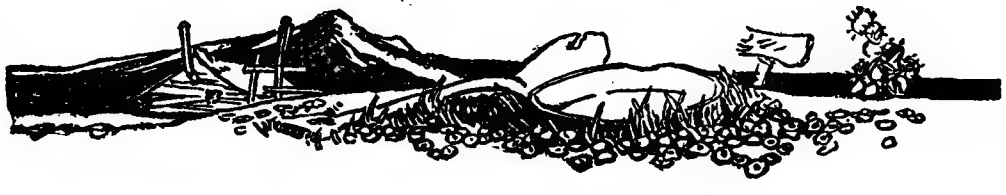
"Fer God's sake!" he whined in protest.

The Professor looked up quickly.

"Hualpai, fergive me!" he begged while the humility of being rebuked with such a degree of feeling quite unpoised him. Then he became his own self, bristling as he sat straighter in his chair. "*I* don't want to take the trouble to say it! It ain't a pleasure fer *me!* But after you've been doin' a thing fer months an' months, breakin' off ain't easy. Besides, who was I doin' it fer, all that time, hey? Answer me that!"

He glared at the subdued Hualpai venomously for a moment, then as if in triumph relaxed slowly, elevating the book again to a reading position and, tracing the line with a forefinger, he half whispered to himself—

"Th' waters of Baden-Baden are extensively used for the——"



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RED FLANNEL

By CHARLES BROWN Jr.

BIG PETER IVERSON waited an hour or more on the beach with the Samoan woman, watching the first screens of blue-gray dusk come down over the island. Then he began to climb slowly the thread of a path as it unraveled itself through clumps of bamboo, his eyes neither on the woman nor the path, but on the opened door of the trading station set low on the hilltop.

As soon as the captain of *The Phantom Dog* had pushed through the bamboo he broke into such big strides that the woman found it necessary almost to run. It was characteristic of him to walk this way, with both sleeves rolled up and his arms swinging. When half-way up the hill he stopped suddenly and pulled the woman by the hand down beside him on the dry tufts of grass. He bit hard on the pipe clinging tenaciously between his yellow, dog-like teeth.

"Molluka," he finally said, opening his teeth just wide enough to remove the pipe, and emptying its bowl, "Molluka, you're a wild fool!"

If his exclamation moved the Samoan woman at all she did not show it. She brushed the loose strings of hair out of her black eyes and continued to look across the water to where *The Phantom Dog* lay with her three masts pricking against the sky, like great black needles. Always it drew and fascinated the woman, yet filled her with a vague sort of a fear.

"Molluka," Iverson resumed, as he thumbed the pipeful of tobacco, felt for a match and lit it, "I'm not going to stay hanging around here forever. I put aboard the *Dog* in the morning. Then I'll blow up the South Pacific into 'Frisco. At Meigg's wharf I'll show them copra like they never saw before. There's life up there in 'Frisco —and love, too. You don't know them things in Samoa, Molluka. Heaven, that your old missionary teacher used to sing about, has nothing on 'Frisco. It's a big pile of bright lights, Molluka — that's 'Frisco. Everybody's happy there, and laughing. And they eat and drink things you never saw before, Molluka."

Iverson wrapped his long arms about his knees and looked at the woman. She was small, but plump, like most Samoan women, and wore a blue wrapper. She had on neither shoes nor sandals. In spite of the strained look of fear in her face, Iverson thought her good looking. He judged her about twenty-two.

"I have a house up there on Telegraph Hill," he went on. "Call it the 'Lookout.' I see it the first thing when the *Dog* is towed up the bay. It sticks up over all the other houses. It's green, like out there in mid-sea. And it has a porch in front. That time I was laid up after the dock strike I put some red flowers in the windows. I'd give you the 'Lookout', Molluka, and them flowers, too. But you're afraid to make up to the States with me. You're afraid of life and love."

He hesitated, as if waiting for the woman to make some kind of answer. A moment later he resumed:

"You say you belong to Perry. Perry's rotting up there in the station from French rum. He don't care about you, Molluka. It's only when some ship blows in to trade or beach. The captain sees you, and first thing asks Perry whose woman you are, like he means to make a trade. Perry gets like a hurricane and the captain decides he'll trade for copra.

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"Perry knows that he bought you with good tobacco, and that when he goes among the houses all the women on the island run away and hide. But sometimes he don't always care about you when a ship's in.

"See, he did that." Iverson leaned over. "You can't say that he didn't."

At the touch of his big hand her wrapper loosened at the throat and fell back. The gash on her left breast was deep, like the cut in the red earth on the hillside.

"Perry stuck you there with his knife, Molluka." Iverson watched her button the waist nervously. "That was the first night I went up to the station. I hadn't been up from the *Dog* ten minutes. Perry staggered out of the room, smelling like a rotten fish. When he come in again, he yelled at us and he shut his fist. He looked suspicious, too. And then he grinned just like this——"

The woman watched Iverson imitate Perry grinning, and suddenly threw her hands to her eyes.

"Stop!"

He looked worse than the leper she had seen one morning creeping in the sun down on the beach.

"The knife was on the table." Vividly Iverson remembered the scene. "We both tried to grab it, Molluka, as it gleamed awful in that half-light; but Perry was right nearest. He grabbed hold of you and slashed at you. You screamed and threw up your hands. When you took them away they were all covered with blood.

"If I'd had a gun, Molluka, I'd have killed him for that. Then he swung around and shot his eyes on me. I thought it was my turn. 'If yer don't take th' *Dorg* back to 'Frisco, I'll——' I didn't hear what he muttered under his breath. But I knew that he was a-scared yellow of the crew down there." And Iverson added a moment later, "You're a fool, Molluka!"

"Molluka no fool!" Her voice was unusually low as she spoke her few words. Since Iverson had come down out of the north, asking to take her back with him she had been too bewildered to say much. "You fool, Pete."

Iverson looked at her and saw that she was indifferent to his gaze, that she was almost unconscious of his very presence. Her narrowed eyes were fixed on the horizon as if she were asking something beyond, and not her companion, her question—

"What Molluka do far away from Samoa?"

Intuitively Iverson heard and answered her question.

"Live happy, Molluka!" His voice boomed like the water down on the reef. "Live! See the streets and the lights—see the pretty white women—be Pete's wife at the 'Lookout' and keep the red flowers growing."

HURRIEDLY he described life and love as it was in the land that is, his red rag of a tongue almost choking back the words. To the Samoan woman it was the most fascinating thing about Iverson, his talking this way. In spite of the unknown fear which gripped her when she thought of running away from Perry to meet life and love, half consciously she urged Iverson to go on.

Iverson put the last touch to the picture. The woman looked at it and thrilled.

"Molluka, Pete'll love you forever! When they tow the big boats down to sea, we'll sit on the porch. I'm not much of a boat outside, Molluka. But I'm built to carry and last. And when I drop anchor I'll stay right fast. ——, Molluka, how we'll live up there!"

Iverson felt her small body brush against him and then instinctively move away. He felt that she wanted him to throw his arm 'round her and hold her there; but back against the half-moon of palms on the hilltop was the house. Iverson turned his tawny head, looking up expectingly, as if Perry might at that moment be reeling out through the door on to the veranda.

When he looked at Molluka again he told her of a saloon where he used to drink, down on the waterfront. The only connection he saw between her and the place was that she was altogether different from any one in it. He was positive of that.

"Molluka, I want to tell you about 'The Swinging Lamp.' It's Mama Cassidy's rum-house. It's down at Meigg's wharf where the *Dog* ties up. I want you to see Mama Cassidy. Once she wanted me to make up to Maggy—Maggy's her girl. Mama Cassidy said she'd give me a vegetable schooner if I'd have Maggy. I told her to go to ——.

"Women are treacherous. They're like poisoned bait, I said. They'll kill a man and everything that's in him. I told Mama Cassidy that I'd keep taking the *Dog* south.

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And I said, too, that Pete Iverson would never bite at that kind of bait.

"But I'll drop anchor now, Molluka," Iverson promised the Samoan woman in the next breath. "This will be my last time here on the *Dog*. You're different from other women, Molluka. You're not treacherous. If you say you'll make up to the States with me, you will. It's easy, Molluka, when you want to live—and be loved."

The Samoan woman turned and asked him a question, point blank. It took him by surprise.

"Pete—when you give Perry gold for copra?"

"Tonight, Molluka."

Iverson shoved his hand into his pocket. As the coins leaped to meet his fingers, he thought of all they could buy for the woman and for himself.

"I'm going up there to give it to him. But it's yours, Molluka, if you make up to the States."

Molluka clutched his arm nervously, then jumped to her feet, pointing to the hilltop. Iverson looked.

Perry had just reeled 'round the corner of the house. They saw him stand silhouetted against the sky, almost naked. He never looked so big before.

Suddenly Iverson saw him turn and fall across the steps like a log. He lay there a minute or more. Then he half rose to his knees and dragged himself up on the veranda. He staggered to his feet and into the house.

"Perry drunk, Pete." In her fear, Molluka forgot what Iverson had once said to her about Perry never fighting when there was money coming to him. "Pete not going up?"

"Nor Molluka?"

"No, Pete. Perry devilfish. He get us if you take Molluka."

IT WAS dark now. The water broke over the reef in soft tiny splashes. A *kapapo*, in night flight above the bamboo below them, cried faintly. Iverson heard the deep breathing of the Samoan woman, like the trade winds stirring the palm tops lazily. In another minute he was climbing the path as it leaped to meet the house.

They were in the last clump of bamboo when Iverson stopped short and took Molluka's hand as it lay on his arm. He waited to see if she would draw away. Then he put his big arm 'round her and lifted her face to his shoulder and kissed her.

The next minute she put her arms about his neck and let her head fall gently against his breast. When she looked up again she pressed her warm lips to his.

"Molluka, let me take you away! Perry'll never get us."

The woman did not answer. She drew herself closer into his arms. She was thinking, for the first time in months, of the nights when she and Perry had rested on the hillside, looking out to where the sky came down to the water in big red streaks. She clung to Iverson.

"Pete, Molluka afraid! Molluka fool tonight! Molluka don't want kiss! Take Molluka up to house, Pete! Perry kill——"

"Molluka!"

She began to cry. She tore herself out of Iverson's arms and fled. When she came to the steps of the house she hesitated, then jumped into the shadows and waited for him. Below on the trail he groped in the dark, swearing louder and louder as he approached.

On the veranda several minutes later, Iverson lay in a hammock, drawing on his pipe and watching the Samoan woman as she stood over against the rail, with her eyes on *The Phantom Dog* as the trade-winds flapped the sails. The forecastle light fell on the water like a hand beckoning to her. Suddenly Iverson saw her turn with a light in her eyes that brought him bounding to his feet.

"Pete!" She crossed to meet him. "I go away with you!"

"Molluka!"

"Pete! You be good to Molluka? You let Molluka live like you say? Make Molluka forget Perry! Make Molluka forget Perry knife me!" Again she was in his arms. She forgot Perry was inside the house. "You make Molluka love big pile bright lights and your house? You get off sea? You——"

They heard a heavy stagger in the room.

"Pete, let Molluka go. Molluka get gun and knife so Perry can't get us."

Iverson let his arms drop and walked over to the railing where he stood with his back to the sea. From the room a dim light struggled out on the porch and lost itself in the moonlight that swept white through the place. Iverson watched Molluka steal into

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the house, her wrapper drawn closely about her.

Molluka had hardly entered when Perry crashed out, naked to the hips, whirling a long brown bottle above his shaggy head. He saw Iverson and swept toward him like a typhoon.

"—— yer! Whar th' —— is my gold? Put it 'ere, or I'll lay yer open like a jelly-feesh."

Iverson put his hand into his pocket and brought out the coins. When Perry reached for the gold, he let him have it.

"It's all there, Perry."

Iverson watched Perry fumble the coins. Then he screwed up his lips derisively and concluded:

"Now you can go to ——. I'm through with you."

"No, yer not!" yelled the trader. Threateningly he raised the bottle. "This business ain't done yet." Perry shot a quick glance into the house and then menacingly back at Iverson. "I'm gonner settle wid yer—now."

IVERSON sprang aside as he saw Perry coming straight at him with the bottle.

The next moment the two men clinched and struggled across the veranda. The place shook as if a storm had swept out of the sea and taken it on all sides by surprise.

With a mad yell Perry raised the bottle to strike his enemy over the head. Iverson shut his fingers about Perry's thick, greasy throat and pressed hard. The bottle fell on the veranda with a crash, its pieces flying over the place.

With both hands Perry fought to loosen the fingers that were slowly choking him. He dug, scratched and pulled until he broke their hold. Iverson felt his iron strength well up in him as he pounded his rock of a fist in Perry's face.

"Going—to kill you—Perry. I'm—not Molluka. You can't——"

The two men reeled and whirled. Once they fell together with a thud which shook the veranda. They arose with their bodies tightly locked and their mouths breathing hard, and fell again, crashing into the rail. It snapped and both men plunged to the bank below.

Blindly Perry rose, swung by and then came with a rush at Iverson as he leaped to his feet. Iverson landed Perry a smashing blow on the chin. It lifted him off his feet and turned him nearly over in the air. He came down on his head.

Iverson stood over the trader and watched him as he lay there, opening and shutting his eyes like a frog. Perry was drawn with pain, his head to one side on his arm and his swollen, yellow tongue hanging out. His face was bleeding.

"Perry, I'm going to send you south without an anchor-chain in a minute." Iverson gave him a kick in the stomach which rolled him over. "You won't be worth feeding to sharks then."

He looked up at the doorway.

"Molluka, Perry's done for. He can't get us now."

The Samoan woman ran out of the house to the break in the rail. For a moment she looked below at the men, then plunged down the stairs and 'round to where they were. She held a gun in her hand, the hammer raised.

With the barrel pointed at him, Perry lay at her feet, trying to reach for the hem of her wrapper. Iverson leaned against a cocoanut-tree and grinned while beyond him the woman saw *The Phantom Dog* with her solitary light. She watched it for a moment, then fastened her eyes on Perry's breast and slowly wrapped her finger about the trigger of the gun.

Perry rolled over on his arm and half raised himself, catching hold of her slimsy skirt. His words came between big painful gasps.

"Molluka—Molluka——"

He turned his head. With the back of his hand he wiped it red and fell back exhausted.

Iverson watched the woman raise her eyes and look out at *The Phantom Dog*, then back again to Perry. He took a step toward her and stopped short as her face turned.

"Molluka!" He read her decision with a wild look. Then he leaped from the bank and down the hillside. "Molluka! Poisoned bait! You're——"

Iverson plunged into the bamboo clump and groped blindly in the dark. The next moment he dropped to the ground and lay quietly while a bullet went whining hungrily above him.

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BILLY JUNE and the MAN GOING OUT

Author of "Billy June and the Private Document."

by WILBUR HALL

BILLY JUNE, the South American "trouble-shooter," looked from Cowder to Weekes, and then returned to his drink. Cowder, Baldwin Locomotive Works representative in Rio, knew Billy's ways. He checked the impetuous Associated Press man, Weekes, with a gesture.

It was a full minute before June leaned back and reached for his cigarette papers. Then he said slowly:

"Now, don't urge me too fast. Just show that last reel over again, will you, Cowder?"

Cowder winked at Weekes.

"You know it, June. What I said was that Weekes, here, knew this man Pennell in the States and spotted him when he appeared in Rio a month ago. We talked about giving the police a tip, then we got into an argument about whether a good, first-class, high-grade States crook could pull anything down here and get away with it. I've been here longer than Weekes has —I didn't think it could be done. Weekes, as I say, knew Pennell's record. He thought the man would clean up and go out safely. And we made a little bet."

"Who wins?" Billy June laughed.

"That's what we don't know," Weekes blurted.

The trouble-shooter ran his fingers through a dozen pockets searching for a match, and Cowder passed the box. June had gained his nickname by several years of successful operations as a professional adjuster of difficulties, great and small, from the Mexican line to the Straits of Magellan, and in the course of his career had been known to move with an alacrity that had dumfounded and confused the troublesome persons involved; but ordinarily he was the most deliberate man on the continent.

Cowder was well aware that the adventurer's leisurely nature was most in evidence when he was being questioned, and he was concerned now for fear the blunt newspaperman would cut a story short. Weekes rubbed a kicked shin ruefully, therefore, and waited.

His cigarette half smoked, Billy June rapped on the table.

"*Cocoa e agua mineral*," he said to the waiter. And, to the others: "That's a nice, long, slow, *delicioso* drink—keeps a man from getting into the high, and at the same time cools the cylinders as well as anything I can think of at this present minute of testifying. Ah-h-h! Now, about your friend, Mr. Alden A. Pennell, of New

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York City. Yes, I should say so. Well, he's going out."

"Why didn't he go on the *Byron* Thursday?" Weekes snapped. "He came tearing down to the Cais in a taxi-auto with the rear tires smoking, about ten minutes before the gangplank was hauled in. Then he came tearing off again five minutes later. Acted like he'd lost his mind or left his gloves on the table at the hotel."

Billy June chuckled:

"Yes, I wouldn't be surprised. He hadn't exactly left anything behind, though. No, I'd judge that he'd started away with something he'd forgot to leave."

Weekes looked at Cowder, with wrinkled brow. Cowder shook his head. But the press man couldn't stand the strain.

"What the deuce d'you mean by that, June?"

"Don't crowd me so," Billy complained grievedly. "Don't come up behind me with your klaxette open that way, and I'll let you in on something. But, as I told Cowder here, when I horned into this party, there won't be anything for publication. Not a small paragraph over among the hotel arrivals, even! Is that clear?"

Weekes nodded.

"I'm off duty, Mr. June, and what I write goes to the States and Portugal and other distant points anyhow. But I give you my word—not a line. Now tell us the answer, because I can't stand on the edge of the grave much longer this way. Who wins the bet on Pennell, the man that's going out?"

Billy June flicked his cigarette through an open window and shook his head.

"I don't know," he drawled.

Weekes's exasperation boiled over.

"Now, can you beat that with a straight flush?" he jerked impatiently. "Cowder said that if any one knew, you would. The police are mum—don't *conhese* anything about Pennell, except that he's a very fine *estrangeiro* with excellent letters of *introducaos* from New York City, and that he's a *distingado do primeiro classe* in his own home town. I guess, Cowder, that our bet is off."

Cowder had been watching June's face.

"What do you think, Billy?" he asked quietly.

Billy June smiled at the impetuous newspaperman.

"Your friend Weekes, here, keeps stepping on my heels and pushing me over to the edge of the diving-board all the time, or I'd tell him," he complained. "Now, don't accelerate me so fast. I was just going to say that if you fellows would take dinner tonight at the Café Biera Mar you might get two-thirds or maybe four-fifths of an idea. Could you do it, suppose?"

"Sure we can," Weekes said humbly. "And I'm sorry I seemed in such a rush, Mr. June. Early training, I guess."

June grinned.

"Early training? You ought to have had mine. I got to be so fast on shipboard that I could eat breakfast between my berth and the deck, comb my hair while I was dodging the captain's fist, and say my prayers between the time that a marlin spike left the first officer's hand and the time it hit a mast two inches from my head. Early training? Wait till you've outgrown it, like I've done. Six o'clock, say; how's that? Fine! *Adios, amigos*, until then. There'll only be the four of us—you two and me and Alden A. Pennell."

"Pennell?" they cried. But the trouble-shooter was gone.

"MR. PENNELL," Billy June said, "these are the two men I told you about—Mr. Cowder and Mr. Weekes. Fine! Now let's take it easy and have a little food."

Alden A. Pennell, the man from the States, was large, handsome, well dressed, and of polished manners. But at the present moment he appeared to be laboring under some perturbation of spirit. He eyed the two newcomers keenly, looked at Billy June a moment and then spoke, toying with a knife.

"I suppose you gentlemen understand my difficulty," he blurted.

Cowder was taken off his guard, but the newspaperman was ready.

"Why, no, Mr. Pennell," he said gravely. "Cowder has been out of Rio, and I've had——"

Billy June interrupted in his usual drawling fashion:

"No, they haven't, Pennell. Fact is, I've been too busy to go through it with them. But, as I told you, they are the two men I would pick out of the whole population of South America for help in your little matter."

He looked across at the newspaperman guilelessly.

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"Especially Mr. Weekes," he added. "He's deliberate and leisurely, is Mr. Weekes, but when he gets on the trail——"

The trouble-shooter paused, shook his head eloquently and buried his nose in his glass. Cowder stepped on Weekes's toe under the table and the two of them turned straight faces to their guest. Neither knew yet what Billy June's game was, but they saw it was one in which they were to play.

Billy June had his little laugh out behind his drink, put down the glass and nodded.

"Yes, they'll do the business if it can be done, Mr. Pennell, and we better get along and start them. You see, *comrâdes*, Mr. Pennell came down here from New York City to sell dredgers in the diamond fields. Dredgers, wasn't it, Mr. Pennell?"

"A new dredger," Pennell said promptly. "I am representing a States concern that has a machine peculiarly well adapted for handling the gravel in this Brazilian diamond field. I came down six weeks ago——"

"Five weeks last Wednesday," Weekes interposed pleasantly.

Pennell started and looked at their faces, then went on.

"I guess it was, but I don't see how you knew. Well, as I was saying, I came down to put this dredger into the field. I had a few letters to men in Rio and when I went up by way of Sitio to Diamantina, I had more letters. These made it easy for me."

"You were selling this dredger, if I understand you?" Cowder interrupted.

Pennell nodded.

"Yes — interesting the diamond men — owners of the mines—what is it you call them here?"

"*Proprietarios*," Weekes supplied.

"Exactly. But I found that Brazilians won't buy much from catalogue, or blueprints, or specifications—they want a sample. They want to see the thing work."

"That seems to be an observation of wisdom and learning," Billy June vouchsafed. "No, I don't reckon you could sell States twenty-dollar gold pieces in this country for nine-fifty per, just on the description. If you knew the class of gentlemen we used to have in here years ago from the States, and the things they did sell by giving lectures, you wouldn't be surprised, either. But go on."

Pennell waited only until the first course was before him, then proceeded with his story.

"I was treated royally up there at Diamantina, as I had been in Rio. But I found that I'd have to ship in a demonstrating model of our dredger. So I came on back to Rio."

Billy June glanced at Cowder and Weekes meaningly, then turned innocently to their guest.

"You've told me this before, Mr. Pennell. Are you sure you haven't left out anything important?"

Pennell looked up.

"Let me see," he said coolly. "I've tried to tell you everything that could possibly be of any value in your investigations."

"Oh, well, let it go," Billy said, with a wave of his hand. "I just wanted to make sure."

Pennell, still knitting his brows as if searching his recollection for any details that had been overlooked, shook his head at last.

"I think that covers the ground. I came down to Rio last Thursday—day before yesterday, wasn't it? I was on my way to New York to arrange with my people to ship a dredger at once, because there's a great field for us here—a big field.

"All right. Now I come to the portion of the story that I have asked Mr. June to help me with. I brought from New York an ordinary cowhide leather suit-case, and in it I carried all our blue-prints, specifications, and catalogues. I watched it pretty closely on the way, because I was aware that, since our dredger is not patented in this country, the plans might be of interest to some one here who wanted to imitate our machine. I don't think they would succeed, but I didn't want to lose all my papers. You can understand that?"

The three men listening, nodded. Cowder asked:

"Did you have anything else of value in the case—money, or toilet articles, or——"

"No money," Pennell said. "And the other traps were of little value, thirty or forty dollars, I suppose. They don't matter."

"Fire away, then," Cowder said.

"Very well. I reached the wharf barely in time, coming in from Diamantina, to make my boat, the *Byron*. I was shown the cabin I had previously engaged, went into it, put down my suit-case, and went

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out to get a New York paper on the pier. I was away probably three or four minutes. When I came back I found my cabin door ajar and my suit-case gone.

"I went first to the captain. He didn't believe the thief was aboard, so we questioned the purser, who was at the gangplank. Soon as I described the case, he said that a Brazilian had just gone ashore with it. He told me how the thief was dressed—nothing very definite about him—and I hurried off to the police."

Billy June interrupted.

"I'm just getting the fag-end of an idea, Pennell," he said. "Let's go back a little. When did you leave Diamantina?"

"Sunday morning."

"Made your train all right?"

A fine line appeared for a flash between Pennell's eyes and he looked questioningly at Billy June. Billy was languidly observing something across the room. The man from the States answered easily:

"Yes, I made my train. It was a little late getting into Rio, and I had several things to do——"

"The *Byron* was due to sail at two o'clock," Billy June remarked casually. "And your train should have been in at nine in the morning."

Pennell wriggled.

"I had plenty to attend to——"

"Sure," the trouble-shooter agreed promptly. "Uh-huh. All right, now—go ahead. After you left the *Byron*, you went to the police."

Pennell's fist clenched and he struck the table.

"And I might as well have gone whistling into a corpse's ear! They didn't hear me. I might have known they wouldn't—a bunch of crooks like they are—standing in with the thieves! That's easy!"

Weekes, the newspaperman, leaned forward, eying Pennell intently. Years before he had been assigned to a big crime story in Pennsylvania, as a reporter, and had seen Pennell two or three times before the man disappeared. Later it had developed that Pennell was the principal in the swindle that was being investigated.

Since Billy June had introduced them that evening, Weekes had been watching for something in Pennell's story that would give him a clue to the mystery that Billy had contrived to throw around the matter. Obviously there was involved more than the mere loss of a suit-case and some dredger plans. Yet, try as he would, Weekes could not find a flaw in Pennell's complaint. The man from the States was apparently convinced that the thief of his suit-case was interested only in those plans, patented in the United States, but not patented in Brazil. Nevertheless, his accusation against the police was unreasonable, and Weekes said so.

"I think you're wrong there, Pennell. The Brazilian police have a pretty high standing, you know."

"I don't know anything of the kind," Pennell rasped. "If they're not shielding the thieves, then will you explain why they refused to take up my complaint? I tell you they know where my suit-case is, and they're going to benefit from the stealing of it—that's all."

"I'm afraid that's a pretty violent assumption, Pennell," Cowder remarked impatiently. "I know some——"

To the amazement of both Weekes and Cowder, Billy June interrupted.

"No, you're wrong, Cowder," he said smoothly. "Mr. Pennell is right. The police know who took that case. They know where the case is, and they're going to keep some of the loot."

Pennell swung on him.

"What!" he jerked. "You don't mean——"

"Oh, no," Billy June said soothingly; "now don't go getting hurried and excited and nervous. Don't let's push anybody into the water in our mad rush, because there's loads of time. Loads! Let's see, where were we?"

Pennell was sulky.

"If you've found a clue, or have any information, June," he said, "I'd like to get it now. You know what my offer to you was—and it still stands."

Billy June took a small pocketbook out and opened it.

"Let's see if I got you right on that, while you're speaking of it. You said you wanted to get back to the States in a hurry, and that every day lost meant money to you. Wasn't that about it?"

"That was it," Pennell snapped.

"All right. Now don't crowd me. Your offer to me, when you sent for me, was that you'd give me three *contas* cash for the job if I turned it up by Sunday noon—before the *Van Dyke* sails. Just so. And for

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every hour I cut off of that time, that is, between Thursday night and Sunday noon, you'd give me fifty *milreis* extra. In other words, the quicker the sooner?"

Pennell laughed uncomfortably.

"Yes, time is of the greatest importance to me. I've simply got to leave by Sunday noon, on the *Van Dyke!*"

"Well," Billy June said with provoking slowness, "I guess you'll make it, all right. I guess you will. But I'm horning in here and delaying the game, which of course costs me money. I reckon that for once in his life Mr. Weekes will have to stand a little hurrying along. Let me take a spin at the rest of the yarn, eh?"

Pennell nodded, and Weekes and Cowder laughed dryly.

"Go ahead, Billy," Weekes said; "but don't talk so fast you clutter your language up or hurt yourself."

"As soon as you got ashore, Mr. Pennell," Billy began, "you went to the police. They laughed at you—said they couldn't give you any *assistencia* at all, didn't they? Right. So you put on your American dignity and went to the consul, and then to the *Guarda Civil*, and then you stirred up the hornets by wading in on his *Excellencia, das Sociæs Estrangéiros*, and he practically threw you down-stairs. Isn't that right?"

Pennell's face was red and his hands shook.

"That's right, and if I don't find out the reason before I get back to New York, the government of the United States——"

"Oh, come now, Pennell," Billy June drawled soothingly; "for Pete's sake don't go pitching the whole States army and navy and submarines and long may she wave bang down here on top of poor little Brazil over a trifle like a suit-case! Don't do it. Think of the millions of mothers that didn't raise their boys to be soldiers! War's an awful— But here, look at me, wasting half an hour at fifty *milreis* an hour trying to preserve international peace. We'll come to that later.

"As I was saying, the *goberno* wouldn't turn a wheel for you. That made you mad. I don't blame you. So you sent for me. Best thing you ever did in your life! You thought some of the Brazilian smart Alecks had stolen the plans and blue-prints of your dredger and would come out with one and beat your imported variety three ways from the jack, not counting ace as high. And so, when Brazil wouldn't help you, you sent for Billy June. As I was remarking, it was a wise caper. Because, between now and eleven o'clock tonight, Weekes and Cowder here, and myself, are going to do a little snorting around, and at eleven we're going to meet you in my room at the hotel *Grande de Jalapa*, and there we're going to deliver over to your said person, on receipt of three *contas* and a few odd packages of *milreis* for under-time, one cowhide suit-case, containing——"

Pennell half rose.

"Look here, June!" he cried excitedly. "Do you mean you've located it? Is it intact? If you make it by eleven o'clock tonight I can catch a steamer going to Bahia at midnight, and I'll double the reward! Do you hear me—double it! Have you found the case?"

Billy June put down his knife and fork, pulled out papers and tobacco and began rolling a cigarette. Pennell was fuming. But the trouble-shooter didn't even look at him until his cigarette was finished. Then, so quietly that he could just be heard, he said deliberately:

"At eleven o'clock, in my room. And Weekes and Cowder and I'll have to do some snorting around. Yes, quite a little! Shall we snort?"

Pennell sat down with a gulp, and the three others went out.

IN A taxi-auto, half an hour later, Billy June, Weekes and Cowder were whirling over the smooth boulevard toward Lavras, a suburban town fifteen miles northwest of Rio Janeiro on the Central Railroad. It was a still April night, and a young moon was floating slowly downward above the *Serras das Esmeraldas*.

The trouble-shooter leaned back luxuriously and drew a deep breath, but both the other men were hitched forward, staring into the road. Something about the case, as June handled it, had wrought them up to a great pitch of excitement.

The adventurer watched them, smiling. Presently he said:

"I'm afraid you boys have gotten a bad steer from things I've said about this business. I guess you think I'm throwing a lot of story-book mystery into it, and you're maybe expecting a tragedy ahead. I want to ease you down a little. There isn't going to be any tragedy."

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The two laughed.

"I don't know what's coming, June," Weekes said, "but you mustn't forget that I know Pennell's history—part of it, I should say—and I can't help figuring that you've caught him somewhere, instead of catching the man who stole his suit-case. In other words, I don't think the suit-case is what you're looking for."

June nodded delightedly.

"And in all your life you won't ever be nearer right than that, Mr. Weekes!"

"What are you looking for, Billy?" Cowder said.

"Diamonds," Billy answered in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Diamonds!"

"Yep. I don't know how many, and I don't know whose they are, but I have a hunch that Pennell started from Diamantina with them, and that they're in his suit-case now, and that the suit-case is in the hands of the people who stole it, and that they didn't steal it for his dredger papers. There, now you've kept hurrying me around until you've got that much, and I hope that's enough for the present. Is it?"

Weekes blurted, "But why——"

And Cowder caught his arm and ground a vise-like fist into the muscles.

"No, June," he said to the trouble-shooter, "that's sufficient for the present, unless you tell us what we're going out to Lavras for?"

June meditated.

"Why, if you don't push me along too fast, I might. You noticed I asked our friend when he left Diamantina. If he had come straight through he would have been in Rio in plenty of time to have made the *Byron* at two o'clock without exceeding any speed limits, wouldn't he? And yet Weekes, here, saw him tear aboard two minutes before sailing time—panting for breath, didn't he? He did."

"Well?" Weekes snapped.

"Well," Billy June replied deliberately, "my guess is that Pennell stopped off on the way—somewhere near Rio—and hid out until he'd have just about time, by hurrying——"

Cowder grunted:

"Ah! You think he had some reason for going through Rio in a hurry. Is that it?"

"Exactly," Billy nodded. "I think he might have stopped in Lavras and I want to find out. And I'll tell you one thing more, and that's all I will tell you. I'm going to make an imaginary trip with Pennell tonight at eleven—I'm going to lay out for him just what happened to him in Diamantina, just what he brought away from there, what he did on the way down, and why he was so anxious to make connections with the *Byron* at Rio. And it's going to be all guess-work.

"If I miss out in the guessing, we'll order a dinner for four at the *Das Estrangéiros* and I'll pay for it. Now, here we are. Weekes'll take the cafés and Cowder can go to the hotels. I'll make a little run-around some places I don't like to have you two see, and we'll meet here in an hour. Is that right? All set, then. See what you can find out about Pennell in Lavras."

Weekes found nothing, and was correspondingly disappointed. Cowder found that their man had been at the Hotel Lavras for about an hour Thursday morning.

Billy June had reappeared with a quiet grin.

"What time did he leave here, Cowder—find that out?"

Cowder shook his head.

"They didn't know anything else."

"All right, then. Hop in. Rio, chauffeur—Hotel *Grande de Jalapa*. And you can take your time—we're not due there until eleven."

Weekes and Cowder did the best they could on the return trip, for Billy June hadn't a word to say. He smoked half a dozen cigarettes, breathed the cool air deeply, and grinned now and again. At ten minutes before eleven they were in the *corredôr* of the *Jalapa*, and Pennell was awaiting them.

"What's the news, June?" he asked anxiously. "Am I going to catch that Bahia boat at midnight?"

Billy June paused at the foot of the stairs and smiled.

"I wouldn't be surprised," he said pleasantly. "No, I expect you'll make it. That is," he added ruminatingly—"that is, if you don't change your mind."

"I won't change my mind, June," Pennell rasped. "And the minute the suit-case is in my hands, you'll get your money and also my thanks."

"Good enough!" June said. "Better take my tip and leave word with the clerk to call you a taxi-auto at eleven-thirty. That'll give you about time to make connections."

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Pennell beamed.

"Are you as sure as that?" he asked.

"I'm just that sure," said Billy June.

The delighted man swung jauntily away to give his order at the desk. Billy June turned about to face an unobtrusive little Brazilian who stood a few feet away, idling.

"All right, Capitao Collares," he said. "Give me about five minutes, before you come up."

Weekes, a few steps above, caught Cowder's arm.

"Do you know who that is?" he whispered.

Cowder nodded.

"Collares—captain of police," he said. "Getting good, eh?"

"I still think I'll win my bet, Cowder," Weekes wriggled.

"No chance," his friend laughed. "Look at June."

The trouble-shooter was watching Pennell with a half-smile on his face as the man from the States recrossed the *corredôr*. He led the way to his room, kicked chairs forward and passed a box of cigars. Pennell, on entering, had cast a quick look around, and now he sat nervously on the edge of his chair.

"Well, June," he jerked, "you can't tell me any too soon. Have you found it?"

Billy looked up with deliberation from the cigarette he was rolling. "If you only wouldn't excite me and hurry me so, Pennell," he said complainingly, "I believe you and I would get along as beautiful as the lion and the lamb. This thing isn't so easy that we can go banging through it like taking a drink. Sit easy a minute, and let's understand it."

Pennell snarled.

"I don't care about understanding it, June," he jerked. "I want that case and I want to catch the midnight boat. That's all that interests me."

"Exactly what I was going to say, Mr. Pennell," Billy smiled cheerfully. "And that's what I'm leading up to. It won't take five minutes, and I want to tell you a story. Sit back and smoke and listen."

Pennell was scowling and biting savagely on his cigar, but Billy June ignored him.

"THERE was once a guy named Smith, we'll say," Billy began. "Smith came from the States to see what he could see in South America. He wasn't particular what line he followed, but his main object was to make a good little clean-up and get out. In Rio he heard about the diamond mines, where you've just been, Pennell, and went up there.

"I've forgotten what Smith said his business was—selling lots in Omaha, maybe, or representing a sewing-machine factory—but his real game was finding out about the people in the diamond fields. He found them different from folks in the States, and the most different thing about them was that they had trusting dispositions and would ask total strangers to carry valuables for them from the fields to Rio—to carry diamonds, for example, Pennell."

Pennell laughed shortly.

"Interesting man—Smith," he said sourly. "Go on."

"All right, then. My friend Smith considered himself to be some smooth guy. He made friends with these child-like natives, and gave it out that he was going down to Rio. He offered, in his guileless way, to accommodate his acquaintances, and they fell into his trap. They gave him several packages to be delivered in Rio, mainly diamonds.

"So Smith started out. His plan was simple. He knew they wouldn't get into touch with the men to whom he was carrying the stones, for some days. He knew that a certain boat was to sail five days later, and he figured on catching that boat on the run and getting clear. It looked too easy—and it was.

"Yes, Pennell, my friend Smith made one mistake, as most crooks do: he didn't take the trouble to understand Brazilian hospitality. Brazil isn't content with treating the *estrangêiro* with courtesy and hospitality; Brazil has a secret-service system to watch over him and see that he is protected and cared for while he's in the country. They don't shadow him because they think he might be crooked. That doesn't occur to them. They only want to make him at home, and secure—make him feel that he's in the land of friends.

"Smith didn't know this. He went on board his ship five minutes before she was to sail. He was tickled to death with himself. But——"

June stopped for a knock at his door.

"*Entre!*" he called, and in walked Capitao Collares, carrying an American suit-case, initialed "A. A. P."

Billy June flicked his cigarette away.

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"Yes, as I say, Smith was tickled to death with himself—until his suit-case was stolen from his cabin."

Pennell was on his feet, and now there was no mistaking his frame of mind. Collares, the police captain, placed the suit-case on a stand and dropped into a chair in a corner where he sat looking at his shoes, wagging them back and forth slowly and meditatively. Pennell turned the case about and looked at the lock. Then he lifted the valise speculatively.

"Well, June," he said, "if you're through with your theatricals, you better tell me what I owe you."

"Call it three *contas*," June replied carelessly. "And throw it on the table."

Pennell was angry, but he was baffled. There was in the room a perfect calm and quiet that seemed threatening, yet no one moved or spoke. The man who was going out pulled a bill-case from an inner pocket, counted out the money, and dropped it on the table. He started for the door, but paused.

"I'm sick of your mysteries, June," he snapped suddenly. "I want to know what it's all about. Who is this man here?" He nodded toward Collares.

Billy June grinned.

"A captain of secret police, Pennell. He's the man who took your suit-case from the *Byron* last Thursday. Anything else you'd like to know?"

Pennell frowned and hesitated. Then he put the case down again, on the stand, and reached into his pocket. What he sought was missing, and he searched other pockets. Billy June laughed.

"Let him try your keys, will you, Capitao Collares?"

The officer drew out a ring and tossed them to the floor at Pennell's feet. The man from the States looked at them, gasped, and turned pale.

"My keys!" he rasped. "How in blazes——"

Then Billy June moved, rising with a start and driving toward Pennell with two long strides. The trouble-shooter faced the other in a flare of wrath, and his tones were hard.

"Your keys!" he sneered. "Yes, those are your keys. Surprised, aren't you? Oh, you poor, innocent, crooked baby, you! You didn't know your pockets were picked by the purser of the *Byron* while he was talking to you last Thursday, did you? Didn't know that purser was a government agent, did you? Didn't know that the secret service spotted you before you made your last rush for the *Byron*, and collared your suit-case, and what it carried, to spoil your little play?

"You're a high-class crook in the States, maybe, but you come down here and every one in Brazil puts it over on you! Do you want to know now why the police wouldn't help you find your lost valise? Do you know now why the Foreign Relations ministry kicked you down-stairs? Would you like to hear what'll happen to you if you ever come to Brazil again? There's a fancy and assorted list of questions for you—and we'll answer 'em one at a time."

Pennell stood leaning against the wall. June turned his back on him and the man instantly whipped out an automatic.

"You dirty dog!" he cried. "You've beat me, but you haven't jailed me yet. Now I'm going."

The trouble-shooter stopped, looked over his shoulder at the revolver, and broke out laughing.

"Put up the gun, Pennell," he scoffed. "Put it up and catch your boat. We don't want you in jail—wouldn't have you anywhere in Brazil, not for all the money you can steal in the States in your lifetime. You're a joke, you are. Here's the door-key—better catch your boat. And don't come back."

He crossed the room, opened the door, and stood back. Pennell looked about him suspiciously, wiping his lips with the back of his hand, then he gathered up his suit-case, wheeled, and passed out. As he went, Billy June made a lightning movement with one hand and caught the automatic, dropping it into his pocket. Pennell stopped, but Billy June glowered at him.

"You better go before I lose my temper, Pennell," he growled. "And you'll shoot yourself in the leg if you carry this any longer. You need a nurse!"

Then he slammed the door.

Cowder and Weekes were on their feet, the former red with excitement, the newspaperman mopping the perspiration from his face.

"But you let him go!" Weekes gasped, laughing hysterically. "With the suit-case! What's the answer? How about——"

Billy June turned to the quiet police captain.

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"Show the boys what you found in Mr. Pennell's suit-case when you took it off the *Byron* Thursday, will you, Capitao?" he said.

The Brazilian agent stepped forward, smiling, and from a pouch beneath his coat drew four flat, white-wrapped packages.

"We thought *Señor* Pennell might wish to see for hisself to prove what *Señor* June is say. So I bring to this place the—how do you call it in the States?—the loot."

He flashed the covers from four small boxes. On beds of black cloth there lay in those packets a double handful of the finest uncut diamonds of Brazil.

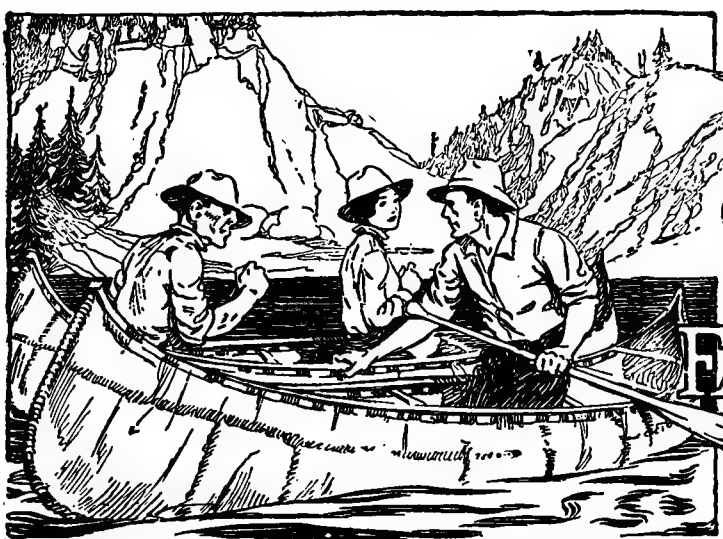
"What are they worth?" Weekes asked, blinking.

"*Mais o menos mil contas*," Capitao Collares replied composedly.

"Three hundred thousand dollars!" Cowder said, and turned to Weekes with a grin. "Pennell was your crook who was going to make his getaway, remember? And Pennell was Smith in Billy's story. And you owe me——"

Billy June interrupted drawlingly, reaching for the door-knob:

"Yes, if you ask me, Weekes, I'd say you lost. Your man was in too much of a hurry to get away. Let's eat."



The IRON FACTOR

A Complete Novelette

by KATHRENE *and* ROBERT PINKERTON

CHAPTER I

THE WINDIGO

AS DAWN came and he could see beyond the cabin to the spruce on the far side of the clearing, Montgomerie lifted his head slightly and looked carefully at every object large enough to conceal a man. For ten minutes he studied the scene before him and then slowly dropped his head.

"They're well hid out," he whispered to the man who lay at full length beside him, sharing the shelter of the same brush pile. "If I can't see them when I know they're there, the breeds won't when they don't suspect it."

"They're a good set of lads," agreed Penwarden, the Lynx Head Falls trader, "even if I do say it. They've learned to do as they're told."

"I guess any one of them could do as well without being told," was Montgomerie's cold comment as he turned again to the cabin.

"They could this time, for there's not one of them that's not looking for a chance to get the Windigo. There's hardly one of them that's not felt the work of him or his band."

"Then why didn't you get him before?"

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snapped the factor without taking his eyes from the cabin door.

"It was only two weeks ago, just before you came, that we learned about this place."

"And it's less than fifty miles from the post," snorted the other.

Penwarden didn't answer, nor did he display offense. The reputation of Fergus Montgomerie had preceded him to the Lynx Head Falls post, and Penwarden suspected, as did the other traders in the district, that the "Big Company" had sent this new factor from the far northwest for a reason. For, though Montgomerie had never been within fifteen hundred miles of the Lynx Head, his name and his work had gone ahead through the interminable wilderness many years before, and the traders were remaining silent under his ruthless criticism.

"Are you sure he's got only five in his gang?" asked Montgomerie after a few minutes.

"It's all that's been seen, all there's been any sign of—five beside himself."

"What is this Windigo? A breed?"

"Not a drop of it in him, if I'm a judge, and I'm the only one that ever saw him."

"He lets his gang do the dirty work, eh?"

"They do it at night."

"Well, we'll see him in a minute. You're sure none of the men will fire as soon as some one shows his head?"

"They've got their orders, and they'll mind them."

"I don't want any shooting until we're sure of them all," explained the factor. "We're going to make a thorough job of this, and we don't want any of them left to get outside with a story. The Government thinks it can handle such cases, but the Government's too slow. When the company suffers, it's got to hit back, and hit back quick, up in this country. It would take a year to get the Government to act."

"It's like the old days, sir."

Montgomerie looked coldly at the little trader for a moment.

"How long have you been with the company?" he asked at length.

"Five years."

"I thought so. There never were any old days. Understand?"

"But I'd heard——"

"Nothing. And another thing. You've never heard about this gang or what we do to them."

"Yes, sir. But if one should get away?"

"None of them will get away. Now keep quiet. Some one's liable to show his head any minute."

The voluble little Englishman subsided. Montgomerie not only had the superior position and a reputation for doing everything he set out to do, but the physical and mental bulk of him overawed even the cockney.

Penwarden felt this compelling force more than the tensity of the moment, and he stole a sideways glance at the factor. The big man's face was hard, his body as tense as his features. Had the trader been a man of larger vision he could have seen the secret of the other's success in the service of the Big Company. The factor did nothing else, thought nothing else. If there was a task before him, physical or mental, he threw his entire self, both physical and mental, into it.

Now, as he lay there behind the brush pile, with men enough to do the work at hand, with every detail planned in advance and the task all but completed so far as he was concerned, Montgomerie still worked. His mind was active in running down every possible contingency that had not been provided for; his body was tense as if it alone were to stand the brunt of the entire conflict that was now imminent.

SUDDENLY the cabin door opened and, in the dim light, a young man stepped out.

"That's him!" whispered Penwarden excitedly. "That's the Windigo."

"The Windigo!" repeated Montgomerie, but Penwarden was too intent in watching the leader of the outlaw breeds to catch the incredulity in the other's tone.

Then he felt the crushing grip of Montgomerie's fingers on his arm. The Windigo was coming toward them.

"Are you sure, man?" whispered the factor tensely.

"It's him, affirmed Penwarden. "Wouldn't think he'd get the name of 'Evil Spirit,' would you?"

"But his real name? Do you know it?"

"Yes. Angus Lalonde."

"Angus Lalonde!"

The factor repeated the name.

"How do you know?"

Penwarden hesitated, and Montgomerie turned toward him savagely.

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"How, man?" he demanded.

"Well, sir, you see he wrote me a note once, a saucy, impudent note, and he signed it with that name."

Montgomerie studied his companion a moment.

"I see," he said. "And you didn't care to show it?"

"Of course not. It was an insult to the company."

"I suppose so. Any one else know that name?"

"I never heard it, sir."

By this time the young man, a pail in his hand, was stooping over a spring less than fifty feet from them. He was such a youth as is often found in the north country. Nearly as tall as the factor, nearly as heavy, yet he had the ease of movement and the step of a wolf.

His face was that of a man not more than twenty-four, and not in his eyes, the mouth or the nose was there any indication of what had gained for him the name of "The Evil Spirit."

As he lifted the pail of water he stopped for a moment, looking into the forest directly past the factor and Penwarden. Then, with a sleepy yawn, he turned back to the cabin.

As the door closed behind him, Montgomerie again grasped Penwarden's arm, this time so fiercely the little trader squirmed.

"Quick!" commanded the factor. "Scuttle back into the brush and round up every man on the job. Get them all. Hear? Every one. And start them back to the canoes. Don't let a man fire a shot or show himself. Get!"

The fierceness of the command started Penwarden on his way before its strangeness was comprehended. But even after he had begun to wonder at the sudden change in plans, he did not hesitate. The will of the man back there behind the brush pile drove him on.

Half an hour later, as the early sun rose behind them, a band of a dozen men was gathered on a beach. Canoemen, packers, employees of the Big Company, each armed with a rifle, they stood whispering together. There was a lifting of French shoulders, half-hidden wonder in native eyes, curses from Scotch lips.

Each man in the group had looked forward to this morning, to what they expected the morning would bring. And now they were standing idle by their canoes after being hustled from what they had confidently believed would be the end of the Windigo and his band. They had not even been close enough to see the young leader.

Suddenly the brush parted and the factor strode out on to the beach.

"Into the canoes!" he ordered. "Joe," and he turned to an old Indian, "you and I'll take the small canoe. Put in enough grub for a week or so, and blankets and a small tent."

The men stared for a moment and then turned to the canoes. The whispering ceased, but there was greater incredulity in the quick glances.

"Ready, Joe?" asked the factor when the Indian had loaded the smallest canoe of the four.

Joe nodded, and Montgomerie stepped in, taking the stern.

"Follow me," he called over his shoulder to the others, and he and the Indian began to paddle out toward the main lake.

Silently, wonderingly, the others trooped along behind. Once out of the bay the factor turned straight down the shore toward the Windigo's cabin, which they had left only a short time before.

Their faces lightened. There would be a fight after all. The grim man ahead whose name they had heard for so many years was only trying a new plan. They laughed to themselves for having doubted.

Expectantly, eagerly, they turned toward the clearing which they had surrounded before dawn. As each canoe rounded the point behind the factor its occupants looked quickly toward the cabin.

On a stump near the water sat a man, alone. He had looked up when the factor's canoe came in sight, but there had been no other movement. As the other canoes, one after another, rounded the point, he looked at them without interest and continued to whittle the wood he was shaping into an ax-handle.

Behind the factor there was a light grip on the paddles, a shifting of rifles to ready places, a bracing of knees for steadier positions.

And then, when still quite a way from shore, Montgomerie stopped and whirled his canoe.

"Penwarden," he called in a voice that easily carried to the land, "go back to the

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post. Take all the men with you. Remain there until I come. I'll be along in a few days."

Without waiting to see whether his orders were obeyed by his dumfounded followers, he turned his canoe and, with only Old Joe, the Indian, paddled toward the beach on which sat the Windigo.

CHAPTER II

THE IRON FACTOR

OLD JOE had come to Lynx Head with Montgomerie, and he had no fear as he paddled in the bow. In all their years together, he had never known the factor to fail, and he did not look for failure now as they approached the Windigo alone while the supporting canoes were traveling fast in the opposite direction.

As they neared the beach, the Windigo paused in his work and looked at them and at the retreating canoes on the lake. Then he returned indifferently to his ax-handle.

Montgomerie brought the canoe up to the beach quietly and stepped out, leaving Old Joe in the bow.

"Wait," was all he said as he walked slowly across the sand, his eyes on the young man on the stump.

Again the Windigo glanced up at the big man, but he returned at once to his work.

Ten feet away Montgomerie stopped and squatted on his heels.

"*B'jou'*," he said as he filled his pipe and searched for a match.

"*B'jou'*," was the answer in a tone as noncommittal.

After a moment of silence, in which the factor studied the young man with glances as quick as the short puffs with which he had started his pipe, Montgomerie turned to see his men far out on the lake and disappearing around a point to the eastward.

"You saw them?" he asked suddenly, waving his arm toward the distant canoes.

The Windigo nodded.

"An hour ago those men were scattered through the brush all around this clearing."

Apparently the Windigo did not find this sufficiently interesting for comment, but he did not deceive the factor. Montgomerie knew the men of the Northland too well, was himself a master in the North's manner of silent conversation.

"Every one had a bead on you when you opened the door this morning," he continued almost instantly.

"But they had orders to shoot only when the whole outfit showed," offered the Windigo mildly.

"The rest of the outfit would scatter without you," retorted the factor, in no way disconcerted by the other's quick thrust at the truth. "You are the outfit."

The Windigo continued to whittle at the ax-handle.

"What do you expect to gain by this?" demanded the factor after a moment.

"We're doing pretty well," was the even reply.

"But, man, you can't buck the company and win—not your way. It's never been done, and you can't do it."

"We haven't had much of a setback so far."

The Windigo kept his eyes on the ax-handle as he made minute parings with his knife. The factor knew too well the advantage a whittling man has over another, but he had believed he could overcome it with this young outlaw. Now he only saw that he was not getting anywhere, and the fact roused his temper.

"You'd 'a' been set back into eternity an hour ago if I had said the word," he snapped, his head at the angle which had put fear into every man in a district as large as a kingdom in Europe.

"And you didn't say it because you wanted the whole outfit."

For the first time the Windigo looked up at Montgomerie, and there was just a trace of a smile around his mouth.

"You'd 'a' said it quick enough if the others had been with me," he went on when the factor did not reply. "What you've got to do is to get all of us together."

It was the first time in all his career that Montgomerie had ever received a direct slap in the face.

"Listen here!" he boiled over, rising to his feet and standing over the young man and his patient whittling. "No one but a blithering fool ever bucks the company. It never has been done, and it can't be done. What could you and your five breeds have done against the dozen men I had here this morning, or the dozen dozen I could bring?"

"That would be plain murder, wouldn't it?" asked the Windigo, looking up again.

"It's not murder to clean out a bunch of thieves."

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For the first time the Windigo's expression betrayed anger. He closed his knife and rose to his feet. His eyes showed his hate as he looked straight into Montgomerie's, and it was a new sensation for the factor to be defied to his face.

"Don't use that word until you can prove it," said the Windigo, and his teeth were tight together as he spoke.

"I don't have to prove that, or anything else!" exclaimed Montgomerie, his temper now beyond control. "I'm here to break you, no matter what you are, and I'm going to do it. And once you're out of the way, we won't be interfered with."

The Windigo sneered openly and turned his back to resume his seat. The factor, making no effort to restrain his rage, strode forward, his hands outstretched. Half-way to the younger man he suddenly stopped. The fury-tightened muscles of his face relaxed. His arms dropped to his side.

The Windigo looked up to see the softening features, the sudden halt.

"'Fraid some of those thieving breeds might have a bead on you now, eh?" he asked.

"Never thought of it," answered the factor in a tone strangely subdued, and he said it in a way that made the Windigo believe him.

"See here, lad," continued Montgomerie, sitting down on a stump near the other. "You're not the kind to mix up in this sort of business. You know as well as I do that it never did pay, whether it's the company you're bucking or some one else. Things may slide along easy for years, but there's always the one end to such things.

"You may think you'll quit and clear out where you're not known, or something like that, but it'll follow you through and get you. It's worse with this game you're playing now, for the company never had any mercy for things of that kind.

"You're not the sort that generally mixes up in such things. You can take a straight start now before it's too late. You're young, and any one could see by looking at you that you're a good man in the bush."

The Windigo stopped whittling and glanced at Montgomerie. There not only was this sudden change in the factor's attitude, but he believed he even detected a pleading note in his voice. Montgomerie mistook the young man's bewilderment for weakening and hurried on.

"The straight game's always best, lad," he said, "even if it isn't quite so exciting and seems harder. You're having a good time and a lot of fun just now holding up brigades and getting the company excited. But that won't keep up always, and some day you'll make a mistake and the end'll come that quick," and he snapped his fingers.

He paused for a moment and then leaned forward. When he spoke, the eagerness in his voice was made more evident by his attempt to hide it.

"Quit this, lad. Get out of this country, where they know you, and get a job with the company. You'd make a good company man."

"I'd see myself in hell, a thief and a murderer forty times over, before I'd do that!" cried the Windigo, springing to his feet and standing over the factor. "The company! What is the company but a pack of thieves? What did the company ever do but rob and steal? Who are the men who work for it but men taught to crush every one else, drive out every one else, even their own people, just so the company wins?

"The company! Hell's crowded with company men. Hell's got a special pit for them because they sold their souls to hold their little jobs. The company takes a man and makes a snake of him. If he's got any honesty, it squeezes it out. If he's got any decency, it crushes it out of him. If he's got a family, it makes him put them last and it first. Company man! I'd rather be a drunken Cree breed than one!"

The Windigo's fury had been as intense as his previous attitude had been calm and disinterested. He shook his fist in the factor's face, and in his rage he danced excitedly before him.

Montgomerie was too startled by this sudden denunciation to resent what to him at any other time would have been sacrilege. He saw clearly that something had prompted this tirade that did not show on the surface, that was not told. For a moment his eyes looked back at the other's without seeing them, for his thoughts were traveling backward through the years.

Then the tensity of the present situation suddenly struck him. He, and through him the company, was being openly defied by this young leader of a scant half-dozen thieving breeds. He had been sent nearly two thousand miles through the wilderness

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to stamp out this youth and his operations. An hour before, the situation had been entirely in his hands. He had had only to say the word and his work was done.

Now his hold had slipped. For a moment he even found himself on the defensive. First the Windigo had smiled insolently. Now he openly defied him, defied Montgomerie, defied the man who had ruled alone over a vast territory.

And he was a company man. He was bred to it, had never known anything else, never for a moment had doubted its right or its might.

Suddenly he rose to his feet and with a quick motion took the finished ax-handle from the Windigo's hands.

"Look here," he said coldly. "That's a good ax-handle, well made and strong. With good use it would last a long time."

He grasped it in his two great hands. They were no more than two inches apart. The points of his shoulders drew together. The knuckles whitened. Then there was a sudden, sharp snapping, a crackling, and he threw down the two pieces.

The Windigo looked at the broken handle. Then he glanced up quickly at the factor. And in that glance he was unable to hide entirely his admiration.

"That was a good ax-handle," said the factor after a pause. "But you'll break the same way."

The Windigo did not reply, and after a moment Montgomerie continued:

"Look here, lad. You saw me send that crew away this morning. You know what they would have done. I'm giving you a chance. Quit this and clear out before you're in too deep."

"Or you'll call them back," added the young man with just a trace of a sneer.

Perhaps it was only the insolence of youth; perhaps the Windigo intentionally aroused the factor, for arouse him he did. Montgomerie, towering over him, looked down for a moment, his eyes lighting for a fight.

"I'll not call them back," he answered. "I don't need them," and he touched the broken ax-handle with the toe of a moccasin.

It was a challenge, unmistakably, and the Windigo's face brightened as he recognized it. Then he picked up a piece of the broken ax-handle and bent his head over it.

"I ought to have a little time to think it over," he said slowly. "It's kind o' hard to change all your plans in a minute."

His hat brim hid the faint smile at the corners of his mouth, and the factor, scenting victory, eagerly agreed.

"I'll be camping a mile down the shore to the west," he said. "I'll be there till noon tomorrow. Is that enough?"

"The answer'll be there before noon tomorrow," answered the Windigo without looking up.

Montgomerie turned at once to the beach. Once he stopped, turned, then went on. In another minute he and Old Joe were paddling out toward the mouth of the bay, and in the direction opposite to that taken by the canoes of his men.

For a while the Windigo remained sitting on the stump, watching him go. Then, as he neared the point, he again examined the broken ax-handle closely. When he looked up the factor had disappeared.

Slowly the Windigo gripped the longest piece as Montgomerie had done. The points of his shoulders, too, drew together. His knuckles whitened. But there was no snapping, no sharp crack of breaking fibers.

Again he tried it, and again, and then in sudden anger he hurled the piece out into the bay.

As he did so he heard a step behind him and turned to see a man coming from the cabin.

The newcomer clearly was a breed. He had the eyes and the skin of his mother's race, but, as the skin was lighter than that of a true native, so his eyes were not the full, black, inscrutable but straightforward eyes of the Indian. The shape of his thin-lipped mouth, the slant of the shifting eyes, the lines beneath them, told plainly that he was all of the worst that the mixing of the races has produced.

"What you let him go for?" he demanded as he stopped before the Windigo.

"What'd I want to stop him for?"

"Him, he get you. He get us all. You know him? Him Iron Factor. Why you no kill him?"

CHAPTER III

THE ANSWER

"THE Iron Factor!" exclaimed the Windigo, and then he added as if to himself, and with a smile, "And they sent him clear over here to get me."

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"Yes," scowled the breed. "They send him from Mackenzie River. You could kill him—but you let him go."

"He hasn't gone far."

"Then I kill him."

There was such intense hatred in the man's tone that the Windigo looked up in surprise. He had never known his lieutenant to display his feelings in his voice. Before he could reply, the breed had gone to the cabin.

A moment later he returned to the beach, a rifle in his hands. Without stopping, he went at once to a small birch canoe.

"Where are you going?" asked the Windigo quietly.

"Me go kill him."

"Come back!"

"When I get him."

"Come back!"

The leader's second command was as quiet as the first, but the breed sullenly obeyed. He returned to the Windigo's stump, and the young man quietly took the rifle from his hands.

"He'll wait," was all he said.

"Of course, him wait!" came the indigant and still sullen exclamation. "He wait like he fight. He get you. He get all of us."

The fear in the breed's last words made the Windigo look up quickly.

"Where did you ever see this Iron Factor?" he asked sharply.

"Me never see him."

"Where did you hear so much about him?"

"Every one know him."

"Yes, they've all heard. But you seem to know more than that."

The Windigo studied the other's face for a moment.

"Guess he got you once, Charley, eh?" and he laughed.

"I get him this time."

The words cracked from the breed's mouth with all the blind hatred behind them of which he of mixed race is capable. His face was distorted in his fury, and his hands were clenched before him.

The Windigo saw this, and by it he knew many things about this man at which he had often wondered.

And he knew, too, that the breed was right. He, too, had heard of the Iron Factor. He, too, knew that the man never failed, that he always accomplished what he set out to do. And he knew what an old company man, steeped in the company spirit, with the power of the company behind him, could do. The Iron Factor must be put out of the way. With him in command at the Lynx Head Falls post, there would be few more raids on the company canoes, only a few more attacks on the incoming brigades. Then, with the power of the company behind him, the Iron Factor would strike, and six men would pass to that great band of spirits of those who had bucked the company.

The Iron Factor's words had been true. It never had been done. But the spirit of youth and the consciousness of his own strength and skill were strong in the young leader, and, still more potent, back of these was a purpose, a purpose that would drive him right on to the end without a pause.

It was the purpose that decided him. He must go on. Perhaps he could not, with the Iron Factor still a menace. Then the Iron Factor must be eliminated, as Charley McCarthy had suggested.

The Windigo, thinking of these things, turned toward the bay. In the ripples was the piece of ax-handle he had thrown from him in a rage because he could not do that which the other had seemed to do so easily.

And he remembered the challenge of the man. It really had been a challenge to single combat. Only a short time before, he clearly had been in the power of the company. But this company leader, for some mysterious reason, had sent his men home and, alone, had remained to settle the question with the gang's leader.

Clearly it was a challenge, and its appeal came to the Windigo with renewed force. The youth in him, the confidence of youth, the desire of youth for power and for achievement, urged him to acceptance.

And he had given his word that his answer would be ready before noon of the next day. Suddenly he wheeled toward the breed.

"The mail ought to pass tonight, hadn't it, Charley?" he demanded.

"Mail?" asked the breed incredulously.

"Yes, the mail."

"Mail she go today, may be tomorrow. Why?"

"Nothing. Come on."

The Windigo disappeared for a moment in the cabin. Then he came out, and, followed by McCarthy, turned into the forest on the other side.

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FOR more than an hour the two traveled by portage and by canoe. On a small lake two other canoes suddenly put out from shore, two men in each, and dropped in behind. At noon all six stopped to boil tea, and then the three canoes scattered on a large lake.

It was night when they returned. Dawn had not come when the Windigo, alone, reached the cabin in the clearing around which the Iron Factor's men had been scattered. Nor had dawn come, a half-hour later, when, creeping as noiselessly through the low brush as a lynx, the Windigo placed something on the ground beside the dead camp-fire of Montgomerie and his Indian canoeman.

Dawn was coming as he crept away. It was just breaking as he tumbled on to his bunk in his cabin and dropped off to sleep instantly, a smile on his lips.

At the same time Old Joe awakened and crawled from the tent which he shared with Montgomerie. He yawned, stretched, tied his moccasins, and began to build the fire.

Suddenly the operation stopped, and he gazed across the white ashes to something just beyond. The next moment it was in his hands, a large, heavy sack of leather, securely padlocked, and with the name of the company across it.

Old Joe held the mail-sack for an instant and then stepped quickly to the tent.

"*Ombeh!*" he called. "Look this."

Men who spend their lives in the open have the faculty of becoming instantly awake. There is no haze through which they must push to consciousness. At Old Joe's first word Montgomerie's eyes had opened, and in the same instant he had comprehended.

He sprang from his blankets and grasped the pouch from the Indian's hands. Eagerly he looked it over, examined the fastenings, felt of the contents through the thick leather. It was intact.

Then came complete realization of what the presence of the bag there beside his camp-fire signified. The Windigo had given his answer, and it was unmistakable.

The emotions of the Iron Factor were too mixed for any one to control his features.

First, he had lost. The Windigo had deceived him the day before in his manner. He thought he had won, but the young outlaw leader had only given that impression that this blow might fall the harder.

Secondly, his failure was more numbing than it would have been the day before, for there had been an afternoon and an evening of many new thoughts, of many visions, both of the past and of the future.

Thirdly, it was his first failure in many years of service for the Great Company. To win had become so common a thing he had almost accepted the belief of those over whom he ruled.

But, lastly, was the insult both to himself, and, what meant more, to the company. When a great concern holds undisputed sway over an empire for a couple of hundred years, legends, customs, precepts, and beliefs assume places in the lives of old employees greater than religious faith. A firm code grows up which is never violated. The impossible is done because the impossible always has been done.

One thing in which servants of the Great Company prided themselves the most was the record of the company's own private mail service. At some distant posts mail arrived only once a year. At more important places there were two trips. In all cases there was a rigid schedule, and it was always adhered to.

No matter if the mail went through two thousand miles of trackless, peopleless, unknown wilderness; no matter if it went by puffing steamer or paddled birch canoe; no matter if it went on the backs of breed packers over sweating portages or was lashed to husky-drawn toboggans and sledges, and galloped over hundreds upon hundreds of miles of drifts, the mail always went, and it always arrived.

Sometimes treacherous rapids overturned a craft. Sometimes blizzards made Winter travel impossible up beneath the Arctic Circle. Sometimes white water reached out with its gripping fingers and strangled all the crew. Sometimes the cold bit through fur, and, aided by hunger, squeezed the lives out of dog-drivers and trail-breakers.

But always some one followed, some one rescued the mail and carried it on. Not in more than one hundred years had the Great Company lost a mail-sack. It was a record which every employee would have given his life to sustain.

And here Montgomerie held in his hands

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the evidence of the first failure. To be sure, the mail was again in company hands, safe, evidently, and would reach its destination.

But it had been in the power of another. It could have been rifled, the company orders read, the company business made known. The Windigo had only made his insult the stronger by returning it, unharmed, to the hands of this strongest of company servants.

Montgomerie tossed the sack into the tent and walked down toward the water. As he went, anger was displayed in every movement of his great body. He, and through him the company he had served so long, whose traditions were his book of faith, had been defied more flagrantly than ever before. The affront to himself he did not consider. It was of the company he thought, the company of which he was a part—which had become so great a part of him.

But as the factor strode up and down the edge of the water, for the first time in his life the company's business became second to a stronger emotion. This young upstart, the Windigo, reckless, insolent in his brief success, was laughing at this greatest of company servants. He knew that this bit of cool, supreme audacity meant that his challenge had been accepted, and its success told him that he had no ordinary adversary. He stopped, and, looking out across the lake, smiled, smiled not confidently, not boastfully, but proudly.

For a time, as he walked, the smile did not leave his face, but when he turned back to his tent he realized what still lay before him. Twenty-four hours before, he had had the situation in hand. Now it was beyond his control. The insolent defiance of the Windigo must be dealt with at once—this man who signed his name "Angus Lalonde."

The Iron Factor halted his pacing past the camp-fire over which Old Joe was now cooking breakfast. The shoulders, which had been squared as if the fight were on, drooped suddenly. The stern lines melted from his face. The thoughts of the night, those of both the past and of the future, flooded in. For a full minute he stood staring at the ground before him.

"I can't!" he exclaimed, and Old Joe looked up inquiringly. "I've got to beat him, and I've got to do it alone."

CHAPTER IV

"LITTLE MISSIE"

AFTER breakfast Montgomerie went into his tent, where, his head propped against the mail-sack, he remained for two hours. Not in all that time did he move a muscle; hardly once did he take his eyes from a spark-hole in the roof above him.

It was the middle of the forenoon when Old Joe pulled aside the flap and whispered—

"Canoe come."

"Who is it?" asked Montgomerie eagerly.

"Guess 'Little Missie.' "

"Little Missie! Jean! Impossible!"

He scrambled to his feet and burst from the tent to look in the direction the Indian indicated.

A birch canoe was coming rapidly toward them from the west. It was a quarter of a mile away, but Montgomerie's first glance told that a woman sat in the bow, paddling as deftly as the Indian in the stern.

For a moment he was stunned by what he saw.

"What is she doing here?" he muttered.

Suddenly he remembered the mail-sack, remembered that Jean was on her way to Lynx Head Falls post. Had she been with the brigade that had carried the mail? Had she been with them when the Windigo stole the pouch?

In his anxiety, because of the danger in which she had been placed, Montgomerie ran down to meet the canoe. She had been following him in the two-thousand-mile journey, and he had expected her soon. Because he wanted a safe passage to Lynx Head, he had hurried his efforts to wipe out the Windigo and his band.

Now he realized what might have been the result of his quick change of plans of the morning before, of his attempt, single-handed, to subdue this "Evil Spirit."

"Jean," he called when the canoe came close, "how did you get here? What happened?"

The birch touched the sand, and a young woman, clad in short skirt and gray shirt, a felt hat riding unsteadily on great masses of black hair, rose to her feet and leaped out.

Impetuously, her browned face beautiful in the joy it expressed, she ran to the factor and threw her arms about his neck.

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"Oh, dad!" she cried. "You're safe! You're safe! I was so afraid, after what happened last night."

"Last night," repeated Montgomerie. "What happened? And how did you know I was here?"

"The Windigo!" she half sobbed, clinging tightly to him. "Oh, dad! I was afraid he had killed you!"

Montgomerie patted the girl's shoulder for a moment and whispered reassuringly in her ear. When she had quieted somewhat he loosened her hands from about his neck and led her to the camp-fire.

"Now tell me about it," he commanded, as he indicated a seat on a windfall.

Jean evidently had regained her composure. She took one of the factor's hands in hers and smiled up at him.

"I'll begin at the beginning," she said. "I got to the Sturgeon Lake post earlier than we expected, and I was just in time to go on with the mail. There were two canoes. On the way the men told me about this outlaw they called the Windigo, and wondered if he would attack them. I wasn't very much afraid, for I knew you had reached Lynx Head Falls two weeks before and that there probably wasn't any Windigo by that time.

"Yesterday afternoon we met a canoe with two men in it, the Indian who brought me this morning, and a white man. They said Penwarden, the trader at Lynx Head, had sent them to meet us, and tell us that we would be safe from the Windigo, as you had dealt with him.

"So the men changed their course, and we camped last night on a big lake north of here. In the night one of the men heard a noise and got up to find that the mail had been stolen.

"Of course, they knew it was the Windigo. The white man who had come with us then told about what happened yesterday morning, how you called the men off and sent them home, and how you stayed alone with Old Joe to settle this Windigo. I couldn't believe it for a moment; and when he insisted it was so, I made up my mind I was coming over here and find out what happened to you."

The disapproval in her father's eyes stopped her for a moment, and then she went on impetuously:

"Don't you see, dad? The men left you with this Windigo in the morning. Last night he stole the mail. I was sure something had happened to you, that he and his men had—maybe killed you. I had to come and find out, and this Indian said he knew a way down to this lake and offered to take me."

"Didn't you know I wouldn't do anything so foolish as to place myself in the hands of —of an outlaw?" reproved her father. "You should have known that I was at least in the possession of my senses, and that I was adopting the wisest course."

"I know, but it was so strange, the white man said, your sending them all away and going up to see the Windigo alone. I never knew of your doing anything like it. And when I knew the Windigo was still robbing brigades—don't you see? I was so afraid, dad."

"Well, I'm safe, and you took a useless and a foolhardy trip," said the factor. "But you can go on to Lynx Head from here and get there nearly as soon. I'll have Joe get a lunch for you and the Indian and then you can start."

"But aren't you going, too? Dad! You're not going to stay here alone, with that outlaw still free?"

"I'll attend to him," replied Montgomerie.

The false confidence in his tone made Jean glance up quickly.

"I don't want to leave you here," she objected. "I'd worry about you, dad. Please tell me what you are planning. Why did you send those men away? You can't handle the entire band."

"I think there is a way to settle this trouble, and there is no danger. You go on to the post and I'll follow in a day or two."

"But how can you handle this band of outlaws alone? The men with the mail canoes told me some awful things they have done."

"I think there has been some exaggeration, and that the right measures will end their activities," replied Montgomerie somewhat ponderously.

But he did not deceive the girl. She ended the discussion for a time, but while he was giving Old Joe directions for preparing a lunch she studied his face intently.

"You saw the Windigo," she said when he turned to her. "What is he like, dad? Is he as awful as they say he is?"

"Hardly," laughed the factor. "These

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people up here let a young fellow set them by the ears when a little effort would have put an end to the entire trouble. I expect to settle it today or tomorrow, and then I'll follow you to Lynx Head."

"Then if there's no danger why can't I stay here until you're ready to go?"

"No," answered the factor quickly, and, because he had made a mistake, becoming stern. "You must start at once. Come and eat now, and then get away. You should make it by tomorrow night."

"Won't you tell me how you intend to do this all alone?" she asked, as she took the plate Joe brought her.

"Perhaps when I get back I'll tell you," replied the factor.

"And you won't fight him and his men alone?" she questioned anxiously.

"I don't think it will be necessary."

Jean finished her meal in silence. As soon as she set down her plate Montgomerie arose.

"Come now," he said, starting toward the lake. "You need a good start, and I'm going to be busy the rest of the day."

"And I can't stay! Oh, dad, I'm worried about you! There is something about it I can't understand."

"There's nothing to worry about, little girl. Run along, and I'll be with you in a day or two."

She hesitated a moment. She had never seen her father like this before. She knew he was worried, knew that he was troubled by something that he did not care to tell her, and she had always had his confidence before.

"Come," he repeated, and she kissed him and stepped into the canoe.

"Don't worry," he reassured her as he stood at the edge of the water. "There is no danger."

She looked anxiously at him, but he smiled and she picked up her paddle.

Oh-sah-gink, the Indian who had found the factor's camp and now was to take Jean on to the Lynx Head Falls post, had enjoyed the early morning paddle with her. There was a rhythm in her stroke, a quick, easy, free swing, so typical of the birch itself, that the miles slid backward as easily as when he drove the light toboggan in Winter.

Now, however, the girl's stroke lagged, lacked the ease and grace he had admired. Her head no longer swung with the paddle, but was bowed so that her eyes did not see past the craft itself.

FOR a mile, two miles, this continued. Then, as they skirted the shore of a rounding point Jean suddenly dipped her paddle far out and drew the bow toward land.

"In here, Oh-sah-gink," she called. "I'm not going to leave him here alone. We'll camp and keep watch."

The Indian obeyed, and a few minutes later he was busy setting up two little tents and performing those magical tasks which make an untamed bit of forest a home in so incredibly short a time.

Jean sat on the shore, sheltered from the sun by a spruce and from the west wind by the straight wall of rock at the end of the point. There, alone, she tried to solve the problem of what her father could be thinking of, what could have prompted him to change his plans so suddenly, and, without help, attempt to cope with the Windigo and his band.

She watched the Indian, busy with the camp work, and then saw him unwind a bit of fishing-tackle and paddle off down the shore in an effort to provide something for their noonday meal.

The sun passed the spruce and its warmth made her drowsy, for she had paddled since daylight. The black flies hummed, a kingfisher chattered, and she dozed.

Almost immediately she was wakened by a sound. She looked around to see a canoe only a short distance away. In the center knelt a half-breed, his squinting, close-set eyes calmly looking her over.

"*B'jou'*," called Jean good-naturedly, but a little shiver followed her words. She looked more intently at the man, who had only grunted and begun to paddle nearer. In a moment he was standing on the beach at her feet.

Leisurely he looked over the camp-site, noted the two tents and the absence of the canoe. As leisurely he looked down the lake. No one was in sight.

"You all alone?" he asked suddenly, turning to Jean.

"Yes," she answered, and immediately saw her mistake. Never before had she had cause to tell an untruth about the commonplace.

He came closer.

"Where you come from?" he asked.

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"Down the lake."

He sat on a rock ten feet away, and again studied the two little tents, the mark in the sand made by her canoe when it had grounded.

"Your man—he gone away?" asked the breed.

"I haven't any man!" flared the indignant Jean.

Again there was silence while he resumed his inspection of the camp-site.

Jean watched him closely. Vaguely she groped for some explanation of the sudden appearance of the man so soon after she had left her father; of his strange, almost insolent actions. She was accustomed to the men of the North, had known no others all her life—factors, traders, clerks, company employees, trappers, both red and white.

But in this man she sensed something different, and then suddenly she went cold all over. The Windigo!

Jean glanced quickly down the lake where Oh-sah-gink had gone. The canoe was not in sight. Then she sprang to her feet and looked over the rock behind her toward the west, where her father was camped.

The stranger watched her, and Jean knew instantly that he suspected her fear. He arose and walked closer.

Never before had Jean feared a man. Now something told her that this man was different. It was a new sensation, and it made her angry rather than more afraid.

"Get out!" she cried. "Get out, you yellow Indian's dog, or I'll have you run out of the country."

"Who run me out?" he asked quickly.

"My father'll make all Canada too hot to hold you."

"Your father! Who your father?"

"He's the factor at Lynx Head Falls, Fergus Montgomerie."

Jean believed that the magic name would be enough, and she stood bravely out from the rock. But the man's eyes only lighted strangely.

"The Iron Factor," he said, as if to himself. "You his girl."

For a moment he stood watching her, and, as he watched, Jean's fear returned. In his eyes she saw hate greater than she had ever seen before, and mingled with it was a growing, gloating joy.

He smiled evilly and stepped closer.

"I guess you come with me," he said, reaching out for Jean's arm.

Jean screamed, and instantly the man was upon her, one hand over her mouth, the other grasping her about the shoulders.

"Stop," he whispered in her ear. "I kill you quick. I like to kill you. But I wait little while. Now you come with me."

He half dragged, half carried the struggling girl down to the beach, and, without any attempt at gentleness, threw her into the bow of the canoe.

CHAPTER V

THE FACTOR FAILS AGAIN

THE Windigo did not sleep long. By midforenoon he was up, his breakfast eaten, and sitting on the stump near the water, shaping another ax-handle. He worked carefully, painstakingly, and there was a smile on his lips. Occasionally he glanced up toward the western point of the bay as if expecting some one.

After a few minutes Charley McCarthy entered the clearing from the other side and joined his leader. There was no greeting, and the breed was as sullen as the day before.

For a half-hour they sat there silently, the Windigo working steadily, McCarthy sprawling on the ground, his back against a stump, and his eyes on the glittering waves that danced beneath the sun far out on the big lake itself.

"Look!" he suddenly cried, so tensely that the Windigo dropped his knife and glanced quickly toward the western point of the bay.

"No! 'Way out!" exclaimed the breed, indicating the eastern side. "Now him gone. We miss chance."

The Windigo saw a canoe far out, nearly a mile, and almost beneath the sun. He shaded his eyes and could make out two people in the craft, now rapidly approaching the point.

"Iron Factor him go back to Lynx Head. That end for us!" exploded McCarthy wrathfully. "We get chance kill him. You say 'no.' Now see. We better go now. He get us sure."

He broke off into a foul tirade against the factor, and once he came near cursing his leader.

"That's enough, Charley," said the

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Windigo quietly. "I was playing this game my own way, and we haven't lost anything yet."

In his heart he was glad because of his victory, even though he knew that from then on, future operations against the company would become so hazardous that the end might come any time. This fact did not dismay him, however. He never would quit, and the game would be the more exciting.

But it was only briefly of this that the Windigo thought as he watched the distant canoe disappear around the point in the direction of the Lynx Head Falls post. His first emotion was of anger, then of disgust. He had looked forward to this single combat with the famed Iron Factor, this man who never lost. The man had challenged him unmistakably, and here, the second day, he was leaving, going back for reinforcements to do that which, as his retreat admitted, he could not do alone.

Robbed of the zest for this single encounter, this combat of skill and diplomacy with the best the Great Company could send against him, and confronted with the necessity of preparing for the attack which he now knew would come, the young leader arose and walked back to his cabin, leaving McCarthy, still cursing, on the beach. As he often did when he planned raids on the Company brigades, he threw himself on his bunk where, his eyes looking only at the low ceiling, he thought over the new situation, and devised new methods for meeting it.

The Windigo, deep in thought, had not been there more than fifteen minutes when he heard a sound at the lake. He was on his feet in an instant, his eyes at a crack between two logs.

Far out toward the eastern point he saw McCarthy paddling swiftly in pursuit of the canoe they had seen a short time before. Instantly he recognized that he had a new question to deal with in the insubordination of his chief lieutenant. His acceptance of the challenge to single combat had brought trouble in his own band. Angry, he started toward the door, only to stop when he heard a step outside.

Springing back to the window he saw the Iron Factor coming toward the cabin and only a few feet away.

Dumfounded by this sudden appearance of the man who, he believed, had run away, the Windigo hurried to the door to meet him. When he stepped out his face was expressionless.

Both men stopped and looked without speaking. Neither betrayed in any way his knowledge of what had happened the night before or of what it meant.

To the factor it was the last chance of success, this meeting with the young man who had so flagrantly defied both him and the Great Company whose servant he was. To the Windigo it was a reopening of this single combat which he relished. And to him it was a reopening with himself the victor, and the lead in the other's hands.

Montgomerie knew this, and when he saw that the Windigo was taking advantage of it he abandoned the shifting for position and stepped out into the open.

"I got your answer," he said. "Is it final?"

"I thought it was when I saw that canoe a while ago. I thought you had quit and gone back for help."

Montgomerie turned quickly toward the lake, and his face clouded.

"Did you see that canoe?" he asked sharply.

"Yes."

"And who was in it?"

"It was pretty far out, and under the sun. I thought it was you going back to Lynx Head."

Montgomerie did not hear this second taunt, or he chose to ignore it.

"See here, lad," he said, and there was no sternness in his voice; "I don't want to have to come in here with a crew and clean you out. I told you yesterday that you've only got a wrong start, that you're too good for this sort of thing. Give me your word you'll get out, and I'll go back."

"And my men?" asked the other innocently.

"Let them go. I'll take care of them after you're gone," and the anger blazed in Montgomerie's eyes.

"Then I can go free, but my men don't?"

"What do you care about a bunch of breeds? They're better off out of the way."

"They've stuck by me through quite a bit, and I guess I'll not be quitting them."

"Listen to reason, lad. You know what I can do, what I will do if I have to. I'm offering you your chance. You're young, and you think you can keep this up. But you know you can't, and you know that there can be only one end to it all."

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Montgomerie extended his hands awkwardly in his eagerness, and there was a pleading note in his voice that attracted the younger man's attention more than his words.

"I'll get you a place with the company, lad, in the West where you're not known, and where this won't come up to bother you. You can work up quickly, and you'll be safe the rest of your life."

"Is the Company so hard up for men?" asked the Windigo mockingly.

"It always wants good men, and I don't like to see you go wrong this way."

"You must have dropped the 'Iron' out of your name when you came from the Mackenzie," jeered the Windigo.

"The 'Iron's' still there," snapped the factor harshly, "and you'll feel it if you don't do as I say."

"How much time will you give me to think it over?"

"Not another minute."

"All right. I guess I'll try to tough it out."

"You mean you are going to fight me —fight the Company?" demanded Montgomerie.

The Windigo nodded.

"I want to ask you one question," said the factor with a struggle to speak calmly. "Is your name Angus Lalonde?"

The Windigo looked up, startled. Then he nodded.

"Scotch and French, eh?"

The Windigo only looked at him narrowly.

"Your mother was Scotch, I suppose?"

"Never mind her!" flared the younger man, taking a quick step forward. "Keep her out of your mouth and your head, too."

His sudden anger was so great Montgomerie drew back, startled.

"And another thing," continued the Windigo, his rage increasing as he spoke. "I'm sick of this palaver. It was funny for a while, but I'm through with it. Go on back to Lynx Head and get all the men you can, and finish this job. You thought you were man enough for it alone, that you could show these fellows around here what a big man you are. But you couldn't do it. An' while you're bringing a crew, bring a good one."

"And you won't—" began Montgomerie, again pleading.

"I won't listen to you or to any other company man again. Get out! I'm through with you. Iron Factor! Huh! Go back and ask the blacksmith what's the matter with you."

He turned and entered the cabin, closing the door behind him. For a moment Montgomerie hesitated, and then, his head bowed, he walked slowly down to the beach and paddled back to his camp.

For a few minutes the Windigo watched him from his cabin window. Then he looked toward the east, where McCarthy had gone. He was not in sight. Instantly his latest problem became the greatest. He must find the breed and punish him.

The young man also remembered the factor's concern when he had mentioned the strange canoe, his anxious glance in that direction. He knew that McCarthy, alone, would not attempt pursuit if this strange craft had gone on down the big lake. And McCarthy's long absence might indicate that its occupants had not gone far.

As the factor disappeared, the Windigo hastened down to the beach and set a light birch-bark canoe afloat. With a quick swirling of water he shot it out across the bay toward the eastern point.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESCUE

WHEN the stranger shoved the canoe off and got into the stern, Jean got to her knees. The man took a powerful stroke that shot the craft out past the point of rock.

Then, paddle darting forward for the second, he stopped, the blade in the air.

Directly before them, coming from around the point, and now swerving sharply to avoid a collision, was another canoe, a young white man in it.

"Hello, Charley!" he exclaimed automatically, for his eyes in open wonder were on the girl.

Jean's captor did not reply, and Jean, because she was looking at the new comer, did not see the hate and anger in his eyes.

The young man thrust out a hand and grasped a gunwale of the breed's canoe as he passed. There was one quick look, a silent movement of the lips, intended for the breed alone, and then he turned leisurely to Jean.

"This your camp?" he asked.

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"Yes, and——"

"It's going to blow hard today," he interrupted quickly. "You'd better not go out on the lake."

There was another quick look for the breed, hidden from Jean, and he loosened the canoe and began slowly to paddle to the beach.

Immediately the breed turned his craft and followed. As soon as its bow touched the sand, Jean jumped out. Instantly the canoe shot backward, and her captor of a moment before began to paddle away.

The girl watched him silently as he disappeared around the point. Then she turned curiously to the young man.

"Why did you do that? Why did you stop him and then let him go?"

"I can get him again, if you want him," he answered in surprise.

"No! No! I'm so glad he is gone. He was taking me away, and he said he would like to kill me."

"Kill you! Why should he want to do that?"

"I don't know, unless—unless—don't you know who that man was?"

"I've seen him before."

"He's the Windigo!" she whispered fearfully.

"The Windigo!" he repeated incredulously.

"Yes, the Windigo, the leader of those thieving breeds. You've heard of him, haven't you?"

"Yes, but I don't see why the Windigo should want to kill you. Didn't he give any reason?"

"No, but I think I understand. You see, when he came close to me, I told him to keep away. It was the first time I ever saw a man in the bush that I was afraid of. But there was something about him that told me he was bad.

"When he came closer, I told him what my father would do if he touched me. He wanted to know who my father was, and, when I told him, he smiled just as if he was glad, and at the same time he looked as if he would like to kill me. Then he grabbed me and threw me into the canoe. He had just shoved off when you came."

"Does your father live in this country?" asked the young man curiously.

"He is the factor at Lynx Head Falls," she answered proudly.

"The Iron Factor!" The young man repeated the words in his amazement: "The Iron Factor, your father! Is he here with you?"

"No," and she blushed and hesitated. "He's camped two miles away. He doesn't know I'm here."

The young man looked at her in surprise, and the girl, realizing his bewilderment, blushed more than before.

"I was with the mail-canoes last night," she stammered, "and this Windigo stole the mail. The men told me father was over here alone, and I was so worried that I had to come and find him."

"Did you?"

"Yes, and he assured me he was safe and that he would follow me to Lynx Head in a day or two. He sent me on alone with an Indian."

"But you didn't go."

"No. I was afraid—afraid for him. I didn't like to leave him alone with the Windigo."

"You mean he is after the Windigo all alone?"

"Yes. He sent the men back yesterday. Two of them met the mail last night and told us we would be safe. Then the mail was stolen, and I was so afraid something had happened to dad."

She hesitated.

"So you came on to help him," suggested the young man.

Jean laughed in spite of her predicament.

"Now you are making fun of me. It does sound silly, but it was so unlike father. I just had to be sure he was safe. None of the others would come because they did not dare disobey his orders.

"And now I'm more afraid than ever. If this Windigo would dare to carry me off, he isn't even afraid of father. He's so much worse than father realizes, and he is there with only Old Joe."

"But why," he suggested, "don't you go to your father and tell him of this? It may make him go back to the post with you."

"You don't understand dad!" exclaimed the girl. "He will never go back to the post without this Windigo. It would make him all the more determined. He wouldn't let me stay, I can't leave him here alone, and I'm afraid of the Windigo. I never was afraid before."

She broke off abruptly, realizing that she had told this young man a great deal about herself and her problem.

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"Weren't you afraid when you saw me coming?"

"Of course not!" she cried indignantly. "One look at you, and any one'd know that you wouldn't even hurt a chipmunk."

"How could you tell that?" he asked curiously.

"You just feel it, I guess. I've lived in the north country all my life, but I never had that afraid feeling before when I saw a stranger."

"And not when you saw me?"

"No. Why should I?"

He was silent for a moment.

"I've heard women were that way," he said at last. "I suppose they feel it like an animal feels a change in the weather. Men are different. They have to find out. But don't you ever make a mistake?"

"I suppose we do, sometimes," she answered slowly. "I never thought of it before until you asked me. How do men tell?"

"Oh, they watch a man, and work with him, and live with him a few years, and then they decide that he is all right or that he isn't. It doesn't take so long sometimes. In the bush a man shows himself mighty quick. I never thought about it before, either. But what you said about the breed, and what a man said to me this morning, set me to thinking."

"What did he say?"

"He seemed to have a notion I was headed for a bad end and said I was too good for it."

Jean laughed so heartily the young man looked up in surprise.

"A woman never would have said that," she stated emphatically.

"You mean I'm not too good for it?"

"No. About you're being headed for a bad end. It's ridiculous."

He was silent for a moment. Then he rose to his feet.

"Guess I'll mooch along," he offered absently.

The words brought Jean's thoughts rushing back from the subject of their discussion to her own predicament. Suddenly she realized how this man's presence had reassured her, how unconsciously she had been looking to him to help her in meeting her problem. She hesitated and then took a step toward him.

"But the Windigo!" she cried.

"I'll watch out for the Windigo."

"And if he comes back while you are gone?"

Her thoughts were in a panic at the idea of his departure and almost unconsciously she found herself continuing:

"You will come back. I need your help, both for myself and for father. We must do something."

"I'll be back this evening, and I'll promise the Windigo won't bother you."

There was an assurance of power in his words, a confidence that was contagious, and, as he walked down to the water, Jean forgot the Windigo and her fear of him. This young stranger seemed to have no fear, either for himself or for her, but, as he floated his canoe, she realized that it was not his protection that she wished.

He had dropped from the sky to save her. He had done it so coolly, so easily, with such assurance. He was no ordinary bushman, this young fellow who was so tall and, she decided, so handsome. And he hadn't even told her who he was. Jean found herself looking forward to the evening, and his return.

"Here comes your Indian!" called the young man from his canoe. "You'll be safe, and I'll be back."

CHAPTER VII

MONTGOMERIE STARTS A REVOLT

WHEN Charley McCarthy paddled away from the beach and left Jean and the Windigo alone, all the rage, hatred, treachery and baseness of which the half-breed is capable seethed within his warped brain.

For weeks he had resented the authority of the Windigo, a resentment which had needed only the coming of the Iron Factor and the events connected with it to become open rebellion.

For the Iron Factor himself he had a hatred so intense it had remained as fresh and venomous as if two thousand miles of forest had not intervened between them. The Windigo had guessed something of the probable cause of this hatred, and of the breed's history, when the Iron Factor had appeared. He had not asked what it was, for he knew that he could not get the truth. When a man like McCarthy hates a man like Montgomerie, there is every reason to believe that the wrong is fancied or due to the

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weaker man's dishonesty. The Windigo only knew that, at some time, the two had crossed and that McCarthy had been forced to flee from the wilderness so far to the westward.

McCarthy had believed that his revenge was attained when he had started away with Jean. Now his hatred was divided between the Iron Factor and the Windigo, divided by doubling the whole.

Revenge, to men of McCarthy's type, is the dearest thing in the world, the thing they most desire, the thing they will strive hardest for. As he paddled down toward the cabin, the demand for it became more insistent. The Iron Factor first. The Windigo second. He must have it.

He turned his canoe sharply toward the west. He knew the factor was camped somewhere down the lake and that he undoubtedly was still there.

After crossing the bay he hugged the shore. At each little point he climbed through the brush to look beyond for the tell-tale bit of white against the green, for the thin, wavering column of smoke.

Less than two miles beyond the cabin he found it. From the brush he could see the factor sitting on a windfall before the tent. Old Joe, angling skilfully, was half a mile beyond in the canoe.

Montgomerie's back was toward the breed, and he was less than a quarter of a mile away. Another point was much nearer, and McCarthy saw that from its shelter he could shoot without fail.

As he crept along the shore, dragging his rifle, proceeding more carefully and skilfully than he ever had in the pursuit of caribou, he began to gloat over the revenge that was at last in his hands. Twice he looked out from the brush to see the factor still sitting on the windfall. From his bowed head, his dejected attitude, the breed believed that he would remain in that position for some time.

At last he reached the point. Across a little bay less than one hundred yards wide he could see the camp-site, the big man with his back toward him. He smiled evilly and then thrust his rifle forward through the brush and looked along the sights.

The desire of the last ten years of his life was to be fulfilled. He could kill the Iron Factor.

The cause of his hate, the long exile from the country he had always known, came back to him vividly. He remembered, as if it had been the day before, his last meeting with the big man, the ignominy and the humiliation of it all.

Slowly the muzzle dropped. Shooting, and in the back, was too good for this despot. It was too quick, too unexpected, without time for remorse, without even the knowledge of who did it. Only face to face, lingeringly, with a mocking smile on his lips, a laugh for the great one's pleadings, could he do this work properly. To be sure there was danger, but the danger was slight when he was armed and the factor without a weapon, without a chance to lift his finger.

He disappeared in the brush, and when he came out again it was behind the factor's tent. Montgomerie had not moved, and, his rifle cocked and thrust ahead of him as he walked, McCarthy, noiseless in his moccasins, stepped around quickly and faced him.

MONTGOMERIE had gained the name by which he was known across a continent in more ways than one. Not only was he hard and relentless in performing his duty as the company saw it, but he had nerve and composure that often aroused the envy of the Indians with whom he dealt.

As he faced the grinning, gloating breed and the ready rifle, he knew that from somewhere in his past had sprung a snake on whose tail he had once stepped. But in no way did he indicate that he knew it.

"Put down that gun!" he commanded harshly.

McCarthy only raised it and looked along the sights into the unblinking eyes of the factor.

"Put it down!" he repeated angrily, and he saw the muzzle waver.

Montgomerie believed that his end had come, but a man of his courage never dies. He is only killed. Now, as he saw the weak, hate-distorted face of the man behind the rifle, his anger grew at the thought that such a one should be the instrument of his destruction.

"You yellow dog!" he cried. "Drop that gun or I'll brain you!"

Suddenly his eyes shifted past McCarthy and he nodded slightly.

The ruse worked. For a second, and in a panic, the breed turned, and in the same

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instant Montgomerie, from his seat on the windfall, hurled himself across the fifteen feet between them and grasped the rifle, wrenching it from the breed's hands as if he had been a child.

McCarthy turned to flee, but the factor thrust the rifle-barrel between his legs and sent him to the ground in a slide that brought him, in a heap, against a tree-stump.

"You're like all the rest of your kind!" exclaimed Montgomerie contemptuously, as the other looked up at him in terror. "You've got the nerve to start a thing, but never enough to see it through. Who are you and what do you want?"

"My name, Charley McCarthy!"

"That doesn't mean anything to me. Who are you? Are you one of this Windigo's band?"

McCarthy nodded.

"And he sent you to get me!" blazed the factor wrathfully.

"He not know I come. Me want to come yesterday. He tell me stay away."

"How did you happen to come today?"

The breed did not answer, and he did not look at the other.

Montgomerie studied him for a moment. Then he spoke more gently, and absently, as if he were thinking of something else as he talked.

"He's getting a little stiff, eh? Running things too high-handed? Too many orders?"

McCarthy looked up in startled wonder. Was this man a wizard after all, as many believed back on the Mackenzie?

"You know what'll happen to you if you stick to him, don't you, McCarthy?"

The breed nodded.

"You look like a bright fellow. I suppose you could swing the others if the Windigo weren't around?"

A new gleam in McCarthy's eyes was all the answer the factor needed. Again he studied the breed, and as he did so plan after plan rushed through his mind. Then one remained.

Unconsciously he smiled as it became clear. He knew the Windigo, understood him, all except the inexplicable hatred for the Great Company. He knew men of McCarthy's type thoroughly. They are hard to rule, themselves love to rule, and he knew that it was only by sheer ability and force that the Windigo kept them together and obedient to him.

If his own men were to turn suddenly upon him, were to overthrow him, there could be no greater humiliation for the young leader. With the zest for power of the youth, with his insolent confidence in his own ability, defeat by his own men would do more than anything else to make him see the futility of his present course.

Suddenly his plan completed itself. If the Windigo's own men made him a prisoner and turned him over to the company, his humiliation would be complete. He would be broken, disgraced, unable to continue this strange war he had waged so successfully.

Suddenly the factor turned upon McCarthy.

"What are you doing in this country?" he demanded.

"I come that time."

Montgomerie smiled because his shot had been true. He did not remember ever having seen the man before, but he knew they had met somewhere, sometime. There could be no other explanation of the breed's evident hatred.

"Can you and a couple of the others, two men you can trust, catch this Windigo and bring him here?"

The breed only looked shrewdly, speculatively, at the factor.

"You'll save your hide, is all!" exclaimed Montgomerie harshly in answer to the other's thoughts. "If you don't, I'll get you if I have to chase you from Labrador to Fort McPherson and back. And—" here he struck blindly, but effectively, in the dark again—"you know I'll get you."

McCarthy did know. Without his rifle, helpless in the power of this man he feared more than any other, fear came to him and gained complete control. And, there was the revenge on the Windigo. Twice in the last week he had been humiliated, had been ordered about like a sledge dog.

On the heels of this fear came the cunning and trickery of his kind. The factor was here alone. With the Windigo out of the way, he could be leader, and the factor would again become helpless in his hands.

Montgomerie had been watching the other's face closely. He knew the kind, and, despite the lack of expression in the breed's eyes, he knew his thoughts.

Then he saw a faint gleam in the eyes themselves, and he smiled to himself. McCarthy would agree. He not only would capture the Windigo and turn him over.

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That would give him the leadership he coveted, the opportunity to exercise the powers he believed he had. But he would go further. The eyes showed it. He believed that, the Windigo out of the way, the leadership in his hands, he could dispose easily of the factor himself.

Montgomerie, confident in his interpretation of the man's thoughts, ignored, however, the possibilities of the plan he had proposed. He knew the breed's kind too well to fear him or the others. Once the Windigo was in his hands, his power broken, he could take care of the rest of the band. He had only contempt for what they might do.

Then the breed looked up.

"Me catch Windigo, bring him here, you let me go?" he asked.

"Yes, I'll let you go if you leave the country."

The breed appeared to hesitate. Montgomerie, elated with what he knew would be the outcome of his plan, was about to offer a further concession, when McCarthy answered:

"Bring him tonight. Here. You wait."

"I'll be here," answered Montgomerie, and the breed turned back of the tent into the brush.

He had not been gone five minutes when Old Joe returned.

"We go today, after lunch?" he asked with the familiarity of long association with the factor.

"No, Joe. I guess we wait here today."

The Indian looked at him closely. Never had he known the factor to act so strangely before. Never had he known him to linger over a task which, by all precedent, should have been accomplished quickly, suddenly, completely, like the stroke of a bear's paw.

"Why you no kill Windigo?" he asked.

Montgomerie looked up quickly. Old Joe had been with him more than twenty years and knew a great deal. But he could not read anything in the Indian's eyes.

"Best way, kill him," Joe went on. "He no good."

"He's pretty young to be killed."

Joe began to prepare lunch as if he had forgotten the subject. As he removed the fish from the fire, however, he looked up suddenly.

"Frenchman on Long Portage young, too," he said. "You have him killed. Not all same Mackenzie River any more."

CHAPTER VIII

JEAN SEES A WAY TO HELP

THE Windigo did not find McCarthy at his cabin when he returned from Jean Montgomerie's camp. As he landed he saw by the sand that the breed had not returned. At any other time he would have devoted himself to finding the man and to crushing the insubordination that had developed in the last two days.

But the Windigo had other things to think of. Not the Iron Factor, with his power and his ability to use it, not the Great Company man's arguments and his reasoning, had shaken his firm purpose to continue as he had planned he would since he was a boy. His youth and his confidence were too strong to be dismayed by the power of his opponents, his purpose was too great to permit fear of consequences to himself to turn him aside.

But this girl, this daughter of the Iron Factor, with her frank speech, her unreserved and instant trust in him, her childlike way of getting at the truth, at the heart of things, had started new thoughts.

Had the Windigo been accustomed to self-analysis, he might have known that a pretty face and comradely smile were the chief causes of his mental disquiet. Girls had played little or no part in his strange life in the wilderness so far from civilization, and his purpose in life had not taken them into consideration or permitted time for thought of them.

He did not understand, then, what led him down to the canoe after an early supper, what placed the paddle in his hands and sent him out over the quiet waters of the bay toward the point around which Jean had camped. Nor did he understand why, as he paddled, he quickened his stroke when the sudden thought came to him that McCarthy's absence might have had a more sinister reason than mere sulking.

His canoe dashed around the point, and the Windigo saw Jean and Oh-sah-gink, her canoeman, eating supper peaceably beside the camp-fire. He paddled more leisurely and drew his craft up beside the beach.

"*B'jou'!*" cried Jean, waving to him as he approached.

"*B'jou'*," he answered quietly, taking a seat on a windfall a little way from the camp-fire. "I see the Windigo didn't bother you."

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"No, he hasn't been near here again. I think father must have got him at last. But aren't you afraid of him?"

"I never have been, until today," he answered almost unconsciously, and then he fell to wondering just what he had said.

Was he afraid of the Windigo? This girl feared him, but she also held him in contempt, a contempt so great it hardly permitted her even to despise him. Then he smiled. She, daughter of a company man, heard only the company version of the Windigo, of this evil spirit that had set a whole district by the ears and driven the great men of the company to take drastic measures to remove him.

"Perhaps the Windigo is not so bad," he suggested.

"Not bad! Didn't you see him today, see his face? Don't you know what he has done?"

"I've heard about him. What has he done that's so terrible?"

Jean rose from her meal and walked over to the windfall on which he was sitting.

"Of course," she said as she sat down a few feet from him, "I know now, after seeing him, that he is only a yellow breed gone wrong. He's attacked the company brigades and robbed and stolen and destroyed things. I suppose you might call him only a common thief if he weren't so fiendish in the way he does things. And it's been as hard to stop him as to put your hand on a weasel."

"Do you know of his ever having stolen anything from the company, or from any one else?" the young man asked suddenly in a tone that had just a shade of harshness in it.

"Of course. He has held up brigade after brigade, stopped company men."

"But never took anything."

"How do you know?" asked Jean, suddenly curious because of this new defense of "The Evil Spirit" and of the knowledge it seemed to disclose.

"I think that, if you ask Penwarden, or any of his men, you will find that nothing has ever been stolen from the company."

"What is the difference?" flared Jean indignantly. "He has destroyed stores, smashed canoes, thrown the men's food into rivers and lakes, hindered them in every way he could, made the canoemen afraid to go out unless there was a large party of them, made the Indians dissatisfied with the company's treatment of them and sent many of them over to the free traders. He has cost the company a great deal of money, and last night he went farther than ever before and took the mail. If that is not stealing and highway robbery, I'd like to know what is."

"There must be something to 'this yellow breed gone wrong,' as you call him, to be able to put the company to so much trouble for so long a time."

Jean turned to him in disgust.

"From what I've been told, any one could do as he pleased with Penwarden in charge at Lynx Head!" she exclaimed. "Now, since father has come, there will be a different story. I wouldn't give a muskrat hide for his life right now, and if dad ever finds out what he did to me, his life won't be worth that," and she snapped her fingers angrily.

The young man looked at her admiringly. He believed he liked her better when she was angry. Besides, she had unwittingly paid tribute to his power, to the prestige he had gained, even though in a strange field, and her faith in her father, after his double failure of the last two days, amused him.

"And you are sure you can always tell a man you can trust when you first see him?" he asked.

Jean looked at him in surprise because of the quick change of the subject.

"I could tell the Windigo when I first saw him," she answered.

"And me?"

"Just the same way." Then she added suddenly:

"But I don't know your name, nor where you live, nor what you do. You see, I'm a stranger in this district, and I must tell father what you did for me today."

"I don't think he would be interested—not after what he said this morning."

"This morning! Did you see father this morning? Are you a company man? Who are you?"

He looked at her a moment, ready to gain the full effect of what he was to say.

"They call me the Windigo around here."

"You the Windigo! Nonsense!" she laughed.

"I'm the one," he answered seriously. "The man who bothered you this morning was Charley McCarthy, one of my men. You didn't think so terrible a person as the

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Windigo is believed to be would run when a stranger came along, did you?"

"But you, you can't be the Windigo!" cried Jean, though her eyes showed her dawning belief as she thought of the breed's ready submission.

He only looked at her and smiled.

"And you," asked Jean incredulously, "are the man father is hunting, is going to kill? You can't be that—that thief!"

"I never stole anything in my life," he answered evenly. "The company can not say that I ever stole."

"But why, then, do you do this?"

"That is a reason I have never given," he answered coldly, and his eyes turned to the lake over which the night was falling.

"It isn't just for the fun of it, surely?"

"No!"

She saw the anger blaze in the back of his eyes. And for a while Jean was silent, studying the young man.

Then he turned and asked:

"Aren't you afraid now?"

"Of you? No! Why should I be?"

"I could take you and hold you until your father had promised to leave me alone."

If he had hoped to frighten her, he was disappointed.

"My father would only keep after you until he killed you!" she cried. "You! You are only a boy, compared with him. He never failed, and he won't fail now."

Then her anger and contempt gave way to sudden pity.

"Why don't you stop now and leave, while there is time?" she asked. "You—you shouldn't do this. And there is only one ending for it all."

"One ending for it all," he repeated. "That is what you all believe. But yesterday and today I beat him at his own game, at the game he himself chose to play. And I can beat him again."

His own words had aroused him and, angry, he leaned toward her.

"Go to your father tomorrow and tell him to stop," he taunted. "He has run a lot of dog Indians on the Mackenzie for so long, he thinks he can run white men the same way. Yesterday and today he began to see his mistake. Now, perhaps, he will listen."

To her own surprise, Jean did not become angry at disparagement of her father. Instead, she saw this man, in all his triumphant insolence of youth, beaten, stamped out, by the Iron Factor. And in the thought she forgot all her disappointment and contempt and experienced in their stead only a strange desire to save him from the fate she knew must be his in a struggle with the Great Company. After a pause she spoke quietly, pityingly.

"You think you can win, but you can't. Do you know that my father never fails?"

"I know that is what a lot of cringing half-breeds say," he answered, calm again. "And you're his daughter, and, of course, you believe in him. But you will all know differently soon."

At any other time the taunt would have aroused her anger, but Jean only felt an uncontrollable desire to reason with him, to convince him and to save him.

"It's not because he is my father," she said. "I've known he was a strong man, have known he always succeeded, before he ever adopted me. My own father was a trader for the company, and when my father and mother died, the Iron Factor adopted me. He has been the same as a father to me, and I love him.

"But before that I knew how justly bad men feared the Iron Factor. You are not all bad, and it's not too late to stop."

She waited for his answer, but he arose without speaking.

"I guess we're only getting worked up over nothing," he said as he started toward the beach. "I'm sorry you were wrong in your first guess of me, but it can't be helped now."

Jean didn't answer.

"But you'll give him my message tomorrow?"

"He'd only laugh and get you the quicker," she retorted. "But if I take your message, who shall I say it is from? What is the name you hide behind this fearful title of 'Evil Spirit'?"

He stopped and turned in the darkness. There was just a shade of regret now that his anger had passed. Suddenly it came to him that his life shut out all possibility of his seeing this girl again, or girls like her. He hesitated, wavered, and then his head went up in quick resolution.

"I didn't choose that name," he said. "I've never been ashamed of my own. You can tell him that Angus Lalonde sent word to go back to Lynx Head."

Jean did not answer, and in the darkness he could not see her face. If he had,

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curiosity would have kept him. But he turned to the water and stepped into his canoe.

Without a word of farewell he paddled away, and Jean, on the shore, did not say good-by.

Instead, she stood speechless, amazement, incredulity and then growing horror in her eyes. As his canoe disappeared around the point she collapsed to the windfall and covered her face with her hands.

"Poor dad!" she cried compassionately. "Poor dad! That's why he's here alone."

For a moment she listened to the ripples of the canoe dying on the sand.

"Now I can help him!" she cried suddenly. "I can!"

She turned and ran to her tent.

CHAPTER IX

THE WINDIGO IS OVERTHROWN

THE Windigo paddled slowly away from Jean's camp. Somehow, he was not satisfied with his visit. He even reproached himself for having allowed his vanity to make his identity known. He had sought to awe her, but he had only aroused her contempt.

And, somehow, the contempt of this girl irritated him. He had believed, as the name of the Windigo spread, and his raids on the Great Company became known, that he was building a reputation for himself, one that would gain respect in certain circles at least.

Now he began to see that the Iron Factor was right. There was only one end, and it was a lonely end. Suddenly he realized that he was lonely now, living in the little cabin with only rascal half-breeds for companions, shut off from his kind.

His paddle strokes had lagged, but suddenly he shot his canoe forward. He couldn't let a girl interfere with his plans. He couldn't let any one. He had a great object in life, and that object must be obtained, no matter what became of him. He had chosen his course, and he must continue.

His canoe sped on in the darkness toward the point of his home bay. In regaining his resolution he vented his emotions on the paddle, and the water swirled away from it in great eddies.

An owl hooted from the shore on his right. He paused, and the call was repeated. The blade was thrown out and, cautiously, he approached the land.

Everything was black above the water. He strained his eyes, and, as he came nearer, he made out a short sand beach and the spruces behind it. Then he thought he saw a dark object move and he halted.

"*Ombeh*," came a soft voice over the water, and he recognized it as McCarthy's.

Slowly he paddled shoreward. He could see the breed standing at the edge of the water. As his canoe struck at the other's feet, he waited silently.

"Him gone, Iron Factor," whispered McCarthy with a string of curses. "Now him get men. Come back. Kill us all."

"When did he go?" asked the Windigo without interest.

"This afternoon. He paddled off by himself."

"Didn't he take the Indian?"

"His Indian not ready," and McCarthy chuckled. "His Indian old man. Know factor long, long time. He know how factor do things. Maybe he help us."

"He might," admitted the Windigo.

"Well," whispered McCarthy. "Guess I do it right, eh?"

"Do what right?"

"Factor's Indian. Me got him in brush."

"Got him here? How'd you do that?" The Windigo stepped quickly to the beach. "That was a good job, Charley. He can tell us several things we'd like to know. Where is he?"

"He tied back in brush. Come."

McCARTHY led the way to the fringe of spruce along the shore. He parted the low saplings and stepped inside, the other at his heels. As the brush closed behind them, the breed stopped suddenly and whirled.

At the same instant hands grasped the Windigo's two shoulders. An arm was thrown about his throat from behind. He felt arms about his legs.

Instantly he became a bundle of striking, wrenching, kicking fury. One thrust of his right leg, and he heard a man crash back through the brush behind him. He got one arm free, and his fist crushed against the ribs of a second. He threw his entire weight to the right and then to the left, whirled and twisted, kicked and struck when he could.

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And as he fought in the darkness, amid the crashing of brush and the deep grunts of his antagonists, his thoughts were not of this rebellion of his men which had come so suddenly. He knew one thing was back of it, and that that one thing was the girl he had left only a few minutes before. The thought made him struggle the harder, and the fury of his efforts was like that of a mink in a trap.

But McCarthy and the four breeds with him had planned their work too well. One at each arm, one at each leg and the fifth for his throat, they at last bore him down, still struggling, but down where their combined weight could make him fast.

He had hardly struck before they were at work with buckskin thongs, and in three minutes the Windigo, bound securely, was the prisoner of his own men.

He did not speak as he lay there looking up at them. He knew them too well, understood the breed nature too thoroughly, to hope for any but one end. McCarthy had overthrown him. The wolf-pack had a new leader.

As the five breeds, panting from their struggle, feeling of bruises, stood about him, McCarthy whispered a command. All stooped and picked up the trussed body of the Windigo and carried it out to the beach, where, with consideration only for the canoe, they dropped him into it. Two men stepped in and picked up the paddles, and the craft drew away.

How far he was taken the Windigo could only guess. He had expected to be killed, for that was the nature of McCarthy and of the others. In that wilderness there was not even need for them to cover their tracks, to take him to an out-of-the-way spot. Every spot was out-of-the-way, and besides who cared how the Windigo's end came?

He was wholly unprepared, however, for the sudden stopping of the canoe after a half-hour's paddle. In the darkness he could not tell where he was as the two men lifted him from the canoe, carried him a few feet from the water and dropped him heavily to the sand. He heard a step up the shore and then:

"Bring him up here."

It was the voice of the Iron Factor. The Windigo, straining until the thongs cut far into his wrists and ankles, strove with all the strength of his superb body to free himself. A rage which he had never known before possessed him and in his violence he was able, bound as he was, to throw off the two men who tried to pick him up.

Then he felt a sudden grip on his ankles, a grip that overcame the swelling of the great muscles of his thighs, a grip that made him remember the broken ax-handle. The factor spoke again:

"Get his shoulders, the two of you."

He was carried up the bank and into a circle of firelight, where again he was dropped. Instantly the two who had brought him stepped back and were gone.

Without a look or a word for them, Montgomerie stood beside the fire, his back to it, his face in the shadow. For a few moments he was silent, gazing into the black darkness. The Windigo heard the sounds of men embarking in a canoe, the swirl of water behind paddles, and then all was silent. At last the factor turned his head and looked down at his captive.

"It came sooner than you thought—the end," he said quietly.

The Windigo was prepared for jeers, for ridicule. He had no answer for these quiet words, words that bore just a trace of sadness.

"It always comes, generally much sooner than expected," Montgomerie continued after a pause. "Especially with youth and its pride. I was sorry to have to do this, lad, but it was the only way."

Again the Windigo could not find an answer. His hatred of the other was as great, his chagrin as deep, but, in this new attitude on the part of the factor, he could find only cause for wonder, not food for angry retorts.

Montgomerie, in the meantime, seemed to have forgotten him. His great hands spread behind him toward the fire, he stood looking off into the darkness. At last he turned his head slowly and looked down.

"What'll I do with you now?" he asked of himself as much as of the other.

"Do it quick and quit preaching!" snapped the Windigo.

"I've broken you, and I've broken your band," Montgomerie continued as if he had not heard. "You'll not cause any more trouble around here, and yet I don't like to just turn you loose. You're too good a man to keep on going wrong, lad. I'd like to see you started right somewhere."

"There's just one way you can do that,"

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interrupted the Windigo. "Call your Indian and let him do it. You're afraid to do it yourself."

"I don't think you understand me," said the factor gently. "I mean what I say. I didn't want to see you wiped out with those breeds yesterday morning. I didn't want to see you keep on this way. I wanted to give you a chance, a chance to break away from this. You wouldn't listen to me, though I gave you two opportunities. Even then I didn't want to give up, so I tried this way. I know it's humiliating, but there was nothing else. I knew it would work, if only I could see McCarthy."

"How did you happen to see him?"

The factor hesitated. Then he said:

"He came here to kill me. Seemed to think I had done him some sort of wrong sometime. But I influenced him to put down his gun and talk peaceably. Then I suggested that he do this."

"And do you know what you did?"

"I accomplished what I set out to do."

"You fool!" shrieked the Windigo in his rage. "You accomplished it, all right. You played into McCarthy's hands, you who ought to know a crooked breed and what he'll do. He hated you worse than I ever saw a man hate another, and he would have shot you that first day if I hadn't ordered him not to. And now he's got you where he wants you, got you where it's worse than a killing. Let me loose, quick, will you? Let me get started."

He rolled and strained in his hysterical fury. When he had quieted a little the factor asked calmly:

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, the girl! Your daughter! Don't you see, man?"

"Daughter! What do you mean?"

"He's got her now. He's been on the way with her a good hour. Let me loose—Quick!"

The factor laughed.

"You're clever, lad, but it won't work now. I'm not through yet."

When he spoke the Windigo's voice showed his great effort to be calm.

"Listen," he said. "Your daughter was here this morning. You sent her to Lynx Head. She worried about you and camped two miles east of here. When you were at my place this morning, McCarthy was following her and found her camp. He was taking her away in his canoe when I got there. I ordered him off.

"Tonight I was there to see her. As I came away these breeds got me and brought me here. The others have her now, and they've got an hour's start."

"You're crazy, man!" cried the factor, though his agitation showed his dawning belief.

"Crazy! Then why didn't McCarthy come here to turn me over? He didn't care whether you got me. He only wanted me out of the way to get her and even up with you."

Quickly the factor bent over the other and turned his head so that the flames lit up his face. For a moment he looked straight into the Windigo's eyes. His hand trembled as he held his face toward the light, but when he spoke it was calmly, crisply:

"Joe, put the rifles in the canoe. Give me your knife."

The old Indian appeared from the darkness, a knife extended.

Quickly the factor cut the thongs, and as quickly, despite his soreness, the Windigo was on his feet.

"Blankets and grub, too!" he cried, springing toward the tent and beginning to carry out everything within.

As if by magic the three had everything in packs and into the canoe.

"In the bow, nitchie," commanded the Windigo as he knelt in the stern, and the Indian jumped to the place ahead while the factor took the center.

Under three paddles, the canoe shot away toward the east.

"Not a word!" the Windigo whispered. "We'll go to her camp first, but we'll be too late there. Only we may learn something."

For twenty minutes the birch fairly jumped from the water as the strong, quick strokes lifted her along. Straight through the darkness they raced, silently, despite their speed, for each was an expert.

At last the Windigo swerved a little to the left, and almost instantly land appeared directly in front of them.

"That's enough," he whispered, and alone he propelled the canoe onward around a point and into a little bay.

Before them were the dying coals of a camp-fire, a splotch of white where a tent showed against the green. Then a pine-knot blazed up, and all three saw that the tent was empty.

"Maybe she's in the other tent," whispered the factor. "The canoe's here."

The Windigo shot the craft straight on

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toward the beach. All three scrambled out as it touched, and ran across the sand to the camp-site, the factor in the lead.

"Too late!" he cried as he turned back from the tents. "The breed's got her!"

CHAPTER X

THE SECRET LAKE

THE Windigo was the first to recover from the shock which definite knowledge of Jean's abduction had caused. The factor, after his first exclamation, stood looking into the empty tent, completely crushed. The younger man, eager to be on the way, turned to him roughly, but, when he saw his face in the light of the fire Old Joe had rekindled, he looked away without speaking.

It was the first time he had ever seen great grief in a strong man's face, and he did not care to look twice. His own emotions were of anger as well as a growing sense of loss because of Jean's fate, anger because of the revolt of his men and the factor playing so readily into their hands, and loss because for the first time he realized that Jean meant something more to him than merely a white girl in distress.

As he turned away from Montgomerie he remembered Jean's Indian canoeman. What had become of him? Old Joe was heaping more wood on the fire, and, in the brighter light, the Windigo began to search the camp grounds.

In the shadows beyond the Indian's tent his moccasined foot struck something soft, and he stooped to find the body of Oh-sah-gink.

"Here's the Indian," he called. "Dead, I guess."

Montgomerie and Old Joe hurried to him, and the three carried the body to the side of the fire.

"Him not dead," stated Old Joe as they laid him down.

They found a bad wound on the head, as if he had been hit by a club or piece of rock, and the man was unconscious.

Montgomerie examined the Indian eagerly, hoping to be able to revive him and learn what had happened to Jean.

"He won't come to for some time," offered the Windigo, "longer than we can wait. And he couldn't tell us anything we don't know. We've got to start."

"What are your plans?" asked Montgomerie, still unable to throw off the depression and effects of the shock which Jean's loss had caused.

"Get after them," snapped the Windigo. "We're wasting time here. Your Indian can stay with the other. Come on!"

Montgomerie followed submissively to the water.

"How much grub is there here?" asked the Windigo as he lifted the canoe so that it floated.

"Enough for a few days, I think."

"And you have a rifle?"

"Yes."

"I've got one cached, and some shells, and I can pick up more grub. We may be a long time at it."

"Wait!" exclaimed the factor. "Joe, take care of this Indian and get him back to Lynx Head when he can travel. I'll leave the mail-sack with you. Deliver it to Penwarden. Tell him——"

He hesitated and looked toward the Windigo.

"Don't tell him anything," he went on, "except that I can't tell when I'll be back."

Montgomerie joined the Windigo at the canoe.

"Where are you planning to go first?" he asked as he took the bow.

"Headquarters. That's where they'll go and probably stop."

The factor brightened at once.

"It's only a mile or so," he said. "Just in the next bay."

The Windigo had begun to paddle, and he laughed as he took his next stroke.

"That's a blind," he explained. "Neither you or any company man could get to it if we wanted to keep you out, even if you did find the way. But you'll see it tonight."

Physical action did much to arouse the factor from the daze into which he had been thrown, and when they arrived at the Windigo's cabin fifteen minutes later, he had regained much of the mastery of himself and the force which had gained for him his position in the company.

But it was the Windigo who was in command, and Montgomerie, because he recognized a strength equal to his own, and because on this young man alone did Jean's safety depend, submitted readily.

"Go into the cabin," ordered the Windigo as their canoe struck, "and pick up all the grub in there. It will last us a month.

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No telling when this will end. I'll get my gun."

TEN minutes later Montgomerie, a large pack on his back, followed the Windigo, who carried the canoe, across the clearing and down a trail through the forest. It was not a dark night, but, beneath the thick spruce growth, nothing was to be seen. After five minutes, in which the factor stumbled along as best he could in an effort to keep up with the canoe, they emerged on the shore of a small lake.

Across this they paddled to enter a shallow creek, through the torturous twistings of which the Windigo guided the canoe as if it were broad daylight.

Then the creek suddenly widened and Montgomerie found himself on a long, narrow lake, high hills on the east and a wide swamp on the west. On north they went for a couple of miles and then, where a broad, flat rock reached out into the water, the Windigo drew ashore.

Straight up they climbed, with the pack, the canoe and the rifles, and the factor felt only bare rocks beneath his feet. Then they dipped downward into a deep ravine in which the darkness was complete.

Once Montgomerie stumbled, and the Windigo stopped and whispered from beneath the canoe:

"Be careful. We're getting close."

Down through the tunnel-like ravine they went, always on the bare rocks which left no trace. At last Montgomerie heard the Windigo stop before him and then caught the gentle splash of water as the canoe was set afloat.

"Let me paddle here," whispered the Windigo as they embarked. "It's twisty and rocky, and I know it."

For five minutes the factor wondered, even with his knowledge of woodcraft, how the young man could find his way so unerringly. On either side he could see high, straight walls of rock. Beside him he occasionally caught the dark shadow of a boulder around which they had just turned. And then they suddenly left the gorge and were floating on the surface of a little lake set down among monster hills. Montgomerie could only think of a little water in the bottom of a deep bucket.

"No," whispered the Windigo as the factor picked up his paddle.

Alone, and silently and slowly, he shoved the canoe down the lake, keeping close to the west shore. Suddenly a light appeared ahead, and he stopped. Then more cautiously than ever he crept nearer. He saw Montgomerie reach forward for his rifle, and instantly turned the canoe.

"Wait," he whispered as he went in toward shore.

They landed on a strip of sand.

"We'll leave the canoe and pack here," said the Windigo as, rifle in hand, he stood beside Montgomerie.

"I guess they're all here. They think that I'm out of the way and that they won't be followed. We've got to surprise them and clean out the outfit before they get set for us, but we've got to be careful how we shoot until we see where she is."

"We'll wade right in among them," said the factor decisively. "I don't care whether I shoot or use these," and he held out his hands, the rifle clubbed.

The Windigo looked at him for a moment. He knew the sort of work that lay before them, knew the men perfectly, knew every move each would make when the surprise came. He knew the lay of the ground, the position of each tepee, where the fire was built which they had seen from the lake, the tepee in which Jean probably was held prisoner.

As he had paddled down the lake he had planned his attack, but now, as he saw the tense, eager form of the man before him, he doubted its wisdom. Could he depend upon Montgomerie to do as he said, to restrain himself that their ultimate success might be assured?

"You wait here," he whispered, "while I have a look around. I won't be gone long, and I can see how they're laid out, and where she is. Then we'll know what we're doing when we start to work."

Without getting the factor's agreement to the plan, he disappeared in the brush.

The camp which they had approached on the little hill-rimmed lake was on a small flat that lay between the water and the ridge behind. Toward this ridge the Windigo went, turning at its base until finally he was directly behind a small clearing on which were a log-cabin and four tepees. In the center of this clearing was a fire, around which he could see several figures.

Cautiously he crept closer until, from behind a pile of brush, he could see plainly everything within the circle of firelight.

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The first figure to be recognized was that of McCarthy. The breed, conscious of his newly assumed leadership of the gang, sat a little way from the others. He was smoking, gazing into the fire, and he seemed to take no part in the conversation.

There were six others, all of whom were eating from a kettle that had just been swung from the blaze. Four were men, the men who earlier in the night had overpowered their leader that he might be turned over to the Iron Factor. The other two were squaws.

The Windigo smiled as he saw that the entire party was gathered together. None was missing. He looked speculatively at the tepees. He felt sure which sheltered Jean, but there was no sign of her presence.

The meal was drawing to a close. The Windigo saw one of the men wipe his greasy fingers on his trousers and begin to fill a pipe. Other pipes came out, and the six, for McCarthy still remained aloof, began to chatter and laugh. The young man behind the brush-pile pressed his lips together until his mouth was a hard, straight line, for he knew that he and his downfall were the subjects of discussion.

For a few moments he waited until he saw that none intended to leave the fire. Then, guarding against any possibility of noise, he began to creep back in the way he had come.

He had just reached the ridge and was proceeding more rapidly back to the spot where he had left Montgomerie when he heard a high-pitched scream and then a roar like that of an angry animal.

In his amazement he stood still and waited. He knew he had not been heard, that his presence was not even suspected. Was it Jean? He turned and ran straight toward the camp, and, as he started, screams, yells, hoarse shouts and, above all, the same angry roar, came to him.

The Windigo was perhaps one hundred yards from the camp when he started toward it. He crashed heedlessly through brush and over windfalls. But, when he at last dashed into the clearing, his rifle ready either for shooting or for use as a club, he found the place deserted.

The fire had been scattered so that the few remaining sticks only smouldered and gave no light. Everything was hidden in darkness, and there was no sound.

Then, from near the lake, came the noise of the conflict resumed. He ran on across the open and down a trail to the water.

Before him, up to his knees in the lake, he could see dimly the great body of the factor, his rifle a flail with which he was reaching for a canoe just leaving shore. Farther out was another craft disappearing in the darkness.

Then, suddenly, all was still. The factor, his rifle poised, stood looking where the canoe had gone toward the north. Then he suddenly reversed his weapon and took quick aim in the darkness.

"Don't!" cried the Windigo. "You might hit her!"

Montgomerie dropped his weapon and turned in amazement.

"Where did you come from?" he demanded.

"Why didn't you stay where I told you?" was the angry retort. "You've bungled this right. They've gone, and they've still got her. If you'd done as I said, we'd have made a clean job of it."

"I thought," faltered the factor as he waded ashore.

"I know what you thought. You thought I'd gone back to those breeds and was working both ends. You wouldn't trust me, and now what'll you do?"

The Windigo's anger was so great he turned back from the lake without waiting to see whether the other followed. He knew McCarthy had taken the girl, but he made a quick search of the place to be certain. Then he walked into the clearing, gathered a few coals and placed wood on the fire. He was sitting beside this, staring into the blaze, when Montgomerie walked slowly into the circle of firelight. He did not look up as the factor took a seat.

"I'm sorry, lad," said the older man humbly. "I know now I made a mistake, a mistake I never should have made. I wasn't myself, I guess, knowing Jean was down there with those devils. And, when you didn't come back right away, I got suspicious. Then I lost my temper, and," he spread his hands in a despairing gesture.

"What did you do, wade right in?" asked the Windigo curiously and not without admiration for a man who, alone, would face five of the character of the breeds.

"I didn't intend to, but when I looked at them there, I saw red. I hardly knew what I did."

"I suppose," said the Windigo after a

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moment's silence, "that my being gone so long did look bad to you. I didn't think of that. But did you see her?"

"No. I didn't see anything after I ran into the clearing. One of the squaws scattered the fire at the first yell, and everything was dark after that."

"But you chased them to the lake down that trail."

"Yes, I heard them running in that direction. I think I got one, half way down there. I don't think he could have lived after I hit him."

The Windigo arose and went down the trail, where he searched for a few minutes.

"You did," he said as he returned to the fire. "I wanted to make sure how many there are left. Come on."

"What'll we do next?" asked the factor despondently.

"We're going after that bunch, man, and keep after them until we get them. That is, if you're game."

Montgomerie was on his feet instantly, the insult ignored, all eagerness to start.

"Please overlook my shortcomings, lad," he begged. "Take me along and try me, and, if we get them, if we find her, lad there's nothing I won't do, nothing the company won't——"

"Forget about the company!" interrupted the Windigo savagely. "It's just you and me, two men, taking this trip. Remember, that and we'll get on better."

CHAPTER XI

THE TEST OF MEN

AGAIN in the canoe, Montgomerie and the Windigo paddled to the north end of the lake where the young man ran the craft straight at the center of what seemed to be an impassable wall of rock that rose high to the hills above them.

They stopped beside a narrow ledge, and the factor wondered what could be the reason. But the Windigo picked up the canoe, lifted it over his head, and, following the ledge to a crevice, began to ascend. Montgomerie followed, the trail taking them nearly to the top of the ridge where it suddenly dipped. Ten minutes later they stopped on a bare rock on the shore of a large lake.

"You'd 'a' had a fine time smoking us out of there, or even finding us," smiled the Windigo as he set the canoe into the water. "I wish it was daytime so you could see what sort of a portage that is to find."

"Do you think they came out this way?" demanded the factor, interest in the Windigo's band and its elimination forgotten before Jean's plight.

"It's the only waterway, unless they went the way we came, and McCarthy would never start in that direction."

"But how can we follow them now, and a night like this?"

"I've been with those fellows around here quite a bit, and I know every move they would make. They think, because you broke into their camp alone, that I'm still back on the other lake. They probably figure that you left your Indian to guard me after making me tell how to get through those portages. Now they'll be going straight north for a ways, and I know just the route they'll take. I've taken it with them too many times."

"If they think I'm alone they'll not be looking for any one to follow them," offered the factor eagerly.

"No, probably not. I figured that as our best chance, surprising them before daylight. We ought to catch them by then."

They started at once, Montgomerie still in the bow, both shooting the canoe forward with that skill which is born in the men of the northland. After two hours the Windigo stopped.

"Go easy now," he cautioned. "They're liable to make camp somewhere in the arm ahead. They won't be hurrying and maybe aren't any more than just getting to shore."

Dipping their paddles silently, yet powerfully, they glided around a point and into a long bay. Down the shore they went with ears and eyes straining for sound or sight of the party ahead.

As they went on, the first signs of early dawn came. The Windigo cursed as he paddled, and Montgomerie turned inquiringly.

"This is a long arm, with a portage at the end of it, and we can't get there before daylight," he explained. "And the last stretch of a mile is across an open. If they're at the portage, they'll see us coming, sure."

They pushed on more swiftly than before, gaining speed even at the expense of caution. But the dawn was faster, and

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when they reached the point of which the Windigo had spoken, far down near the end of the long arm of the lake, they were able to see across a mile of water.

"We may have time," gasped the Windigo as they dashed on.

But, as they rounded the point, both stopped paddling instantly. Down at the end of the bay a man stood on the shore. He was just stooping to lift a canoe to his shoulders when suddenly he straightened.

"He sees us!" exclaimed Montgomerie.

"And he's the last one to cross," added the Windigo. "I was a fool not to take a look around the point first, but I never thought they'd go beyond that portage. There's a good camping spot on the other end."

"But they have only a mile start on us," offered Montgomerie hopefully.

"More than that. The portage is short, only a couple of hundred steps, and the route from there on is down a river. They'll be three miles away, with that current behind them, before we get started in the stream."

They started to paddle at once, but this time it was with a steadier stroke. Both realized the chase would not be finished in an hour, in a day, a week, perhaps not in a month.

"We've got to go careful in that river, lad," said the factor after a few strokes. "It would be easy for them to pot us from the bank as we passed."

"I thought of that, but there's no chance of it. Any one else would, but not those breeds. Night before last when we—well, when we made a little trip together—McCarthy was telling the others about you, about some of the things he said you had done. Like a breed, he painted you as something else than an ordinary, two-legged man, and it didn't take much to make them believe a lot more than he told. Besides, they'd all heard of you, even before you came to Lynx Head.

"Last night put the cap on the whole business. I know now just what they think. they figure that if you got out of the secret lake you must have killed me and taken my spirit and that it will guide you to them wherever they go. They won't waste any time stopping for pot-shots, for they think the devil himself is after them."

"But McCarthy won't believe all that," objected the factor.

"Maybe not, but McCarthy or any one else couldn't hold the other three and the squaws if they believed it. Anyhow, it's our only chance and, pot-shots or not, we've got to follow them down that river."

Montgomerie showed his willingness to take that chance or any other by adding power to his stroke, and they shot ahead toward the portage.

ONE week alone in the wilderness is sufficient to shatter a friendship that has lasted through years of city life. A year of co-operative endeavor in an office will not attach two men so firmly as a day of toil in the forest.

It is in the wide, open places, the trailless voids of the bare spots on the map, on sweating portage and in rapid-wrenched canoe, beside the lean grub-sack, to the music of endless crunching of snowshoes, in the glow of far camp-fires, that men find themselves and each other.

No acid bites so deeply as the absolute weariness of the trail. No laboratory method searches so thoroughly for hidden weaknesses as the ceaseless, monotonous struggle of wind-driven canoe and aching shoulders. All the meanness and littleness and selfishness of a man is forced to the surface, exposed in the full sunlight to his companion. His every thought, his very soul, is bared.

Men have survived such tests, many of them, and to such men has come that greatest thing in the world, the friendship of another man. Those two who have made a long wilderness journey, sharing in the toil and the hardship and the disappointment, who have stood the test, are forever after inseparable, even though half the world lie between them.

It was on such a journey, such a test, that Fergus Montgomerie, the Iron Factor, a man who had spent his life in the great wilderness of North America, and Angus Lalonde, the Windigo, thoroughly a man of the northland despite the strange career he had chosen, that these two started as they portaged to the swift river that flowed from the end of the long arm.

There followed a day of toil. They shot rapids, struggled over portages, fought head winds on the quiet reaches in the great swamps, and in all that day they did not again catch a glimpse of the canoes they knew were fleeing before them.

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And it was only the beginning of many such days. From the first break of the northland's early dawn to the last flicker of the late twilight, they pressed on, their paddle strokes as quick at the end as at the beginning.

The third day, as they landed to make a portage out of a lake, the Windigo suddenly set down the canoe which he had just lifted to his shoulders.

"Wait!" he cried, running forward on the trail.

He bent down where a bit of soft earth showed between the rocks. Then he ran on, to stoop again. A moment later he disappeared around a bend, and Montgomerie hurried after him.

"What is it?" asked the factor anxiously as he caught the other across the portage on the shore of a small muskeg lake.

"They didn't come this way! We've lost them!"

Together they ran back to the canoe. At the shore the Windigo looked down the lake eagerly.

"There's a low place in the hills over there," he said. "We'll try it."

Back, down the lake a mile they paddled, only to fail to find any sign of a portage.

"There's a cut through the ridge to the west," said Montgomerie.

They paddled across the lake to be rewarded by the dim outline of a trail leading into the brush.

"They took it!" cried the factor as he sprang ashore.

The pursuit was resumed. Twice they found camping spots, the ashes of dead fires, bones of fish, and once half the carcass of a caribou.

"They're getting their grub as they go," remarked the Windigo. "That'll help, because it takes time, and it means some hungry days."

At the end of the sixth day the toil began to tell on both men. They slept only through the short night, and every hour of daylight was spent in the canoe or on portages. It is at such times that nerves are tightened, tempers made raw, that the angry retort, the sullen dissatisfaction, are close to the surface.

In addition, the Windigo's temper had not been of the best at the start. He had begun the journey with a growing scorn for this Iron Factor, this man over whom he had twice shown his superiority, who had fallen so easily into the breed's trap. And the scorn had brought contempt, for he believed that the man's reputation had been built on bullying, bluffing tactics rather than on sheer ability as the woodsman knows ability.

As the long days passed, however, there came a change in the attitude of the Windigo. His speech was no longer curt and contemptuous as on the first day. He no longer sneered, and gradually he began to discuss things with the factor rather than assume the leadership as at the beginning.

For not once had he seen a sign of wavering on the part of Montgomerie. The stern man knows just how much force the bow paddler employs, and not in all the long miles had he felt a falter in the canoe.

The portages were dim, rarely traveled trails, over rocky ridges, up steep inclines, through swamps in which the traveler sank to the knees. But always Montgomerie pushed on, tireless, eager, even-tempered.

Neither was any camp duty too menial, nor was any work shirked for the other, as it is so easily done. The factor, who for years had been accustomed to being waited upon, shared in the cooking, the dishwashing, the spreading of the blankets, without complaint, without any evidences of distaste for his work.

The Windigo was himself as tireless. His youthful, unsapped nerve-force was a better equipment for such a journey, and he drew upon it to the utmost. For eighteen long hours he would swing his paddle swiftly, strongly, and then carry the canoe through a mile of miry swamp. At night he was out of the craft with a quick spring, starting a fire before the ripples made by their coming had ceased lapping against the shore.

But little was said by either man. There were the necessary discussions about the probable route of the fugitives, the eager comments on signs at portages, the short discussion of the progress of the chase as they rolled into their blankets at night. But that was all.

Instead, there grew up between the two a bond which words could never form. To the Windigo, Montgomerie became a man as himself, a man willing to bear any burden, endure any hardship that fell to his lot, and to endure it cheerfully. To the factor, the other, with youth's elasticity, was a constant source of inspiration to renewed effort. He formed, for Montgomerie, a reflection of himself in his earlier days.

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At the end of a week the men were speaking to each other in low, intimate tones. Never did thought come to either of their relations of only a few days before. Never did they think of the challenge which one had given and the other had accepted.

IT WAS at the end of the tenth day that the first expression of this new intimacy, this new respect of one man for another, came. As they stumbled wearily to the end of a portage, the Windigo kicked a charred stick from a camp-fire, and a tiny column of smoke arose from the ashes.

"We're getting closer, old fellow!" he exclaimed as he set down the canoe.

The factor looked at him wistfully, almost, as they stood beside the smoldering fire. Then he placed a hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"Angus, we're winning," he said slowly.

Then he shook the other roughly and turned to the water.

"Come on, laddie," he called. "We'll get them now."

And so a bond of gentleness began to grow between them, and there was a new joy in each heart as they raced on through the wilderness.

At the beginning of the third week their first great disappointment came. They had been gaining steadily, and twice more had found warm ashes on camp-sites of the fleeing breeds. Then they portaged into a body of water that stretched thirty miles to the northwest.

"Narrow Lake," commented Angus as he set down the canoe on the shore. "It's not more than two miles wide anywhere, mostly less, but it's a long way to the other end. There's a portage there that takes you to the big river, and we've got to get them before they strike it, for they might go up or down, and we'd never know."

But, at the end of a hard day's toil, they found that the portage had not been crossed. They spent an hour assuring themselves that McCarthy and his men had not found another way through, but there was no sign of any one having been there that year.

As they were returning to the canoe, Angus suddenly ran forward.

"I know!" he cried as he took his place in the stern. "They left the lake half-way down. Across the portage here the big river runs north; but back, down the lake, across those low hills, is a stream running south fifty miles before it turns farther west to strike the big river. They took that way, and they think they've lost us."

Back nearly twenty miles they paddled to find that Angus had been right.

"Now they're a day and a half ahead of us," he complained. "I should have thought of what McCarthy would do."

"Never mind, lad," was the factor's cheerful reply. "You've been following them better than a hound so far, better than any one I ever saw could have done it, and we're not beaten yet."

With renewed determination they began the portage. It was a long one, two miles of broken rock and steep hills, and then a long stretch of miry muskeg into which they sank so deeply it was with difficulty they could pull out their feet.

But always the fresh sign of the others drew them on, and they came at last to the bank of the river and to the camping spot of the breeds.

"They've just left!" exclaimed Angus. "They thought we would lose them on Narrow Lake, and they stayed here for a day to rest. They probably watched us go by."

Eagerly he ran about the camp-site, examining everything that would give any clew as to the condition of the men he was pursuing, their food supply, their habits, whether those of exhausted men or of men ready for a fresh burst of speed.

Suddenly he straightened quickly and glanced at the factor, who was preparing lunch. Then he began again a search of the entire place.

At last, wearily, despondently, and yet with a growing spark of anger in his eyes, he turned to Montgomerie.

"Old fellow," he said quietly, but in a tone that made the other look up quickly. "She's not with them. There's not a sign of her having been here, not a footprint or anything else. There were only men here. Jean never went through with them."

CHAPTER XII

ONE SEARCH IS ENDED

"YOU don't mean—" Montgomerie began, and then he stopped, his face gray beneath the tan, his eyes staring fearfully at Angus.

"I don't know," answered the other.

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For a time the two were silent. After the three weeks of toil in which they had driven themselves to the utmost, the knowledge that, after all, they had not been pursuing Jean, and the fear of what had happened to her, numbed them completely. On top of the mental depression their physical weariness rushed in, and their bodies drooped as did their spirits.

Angus was the first to move. Arising stiffly, he mechanically took up the work of preparing lunch. Montgomerie still gazed apathetically across the river, and he did not move until Angus placed a hand on his shoulder and said softly:

"Come and eat, old fellow."

The strong tea revived them somewhat, but they did not speak as they ate. At the end of the meal they lighted their pipes and stretched out in the warm sun. Suddenly Angus rolled over on to his stomach so that he could see the factor.

"Have you noticed a sign of her since we started?" he demanded explosively.

Montgomerie looked at him wonderingly. There was a faint gleam of hope in the young man's eyes, and he puzzled over it before he answered.

"As I think of it, I don't know as I have," he said.

"Neither have I. We took it for granted that she left the headquarters with them, and we haven't paid much attention to signs, in our rush. A foot-print or two in the mud, and we knew we were on the right track and hurried on.

"As I think of it now, I don't remember seeing a sign of any one except the men. Another thing. They camped any old how, never a tent or a bed of boughs, as we would expect when they were in a hurry. We have done the same. That wouldn't give much chance to find signs of her, and we didn't expect them.

"But Jean had a small foot, and she knew enough about the bush to leave some sign for any one following her, something that would let us know she was all right, like broken twigs on portages, or a strip of her dress on a camp-site."

"And she's got spirit," interrupted the factor eagerly. "She would have delayed them whenever she could, and she would fight right through to the end. But they didn't delay any," he added ruefully.

Angus smiled and jumped to his feet.

"I've got an idea, old fellow," he cried enthusiastically as he began to pick up the dishes. "McCarthy is nobody's fool, even if he is a crooked breed. And McCarthy certainly was afraid of you. He thought he was safe when he got her to the headquarters on the secret lake, but it isn't like him to take any chances. He was like a white man there, always guarded against the unexpected happening. He is the one that suggested caching food and blankets on each of the secret portages so that, if we ever were discovered and had to leave in a hurry, we would have supplies for a short time. He picked up one of those caches, and that's partly what they've been living on."

"You mean," demanded Montgomerie eagerly, "that Jean never was taken from the headquarters where I jumped them? Do you think she is still there?"

"No, not there, but pretty close to where we are now."

"Close to us! How could she get near here if McCarthy didn't bring her?"

"The squaws. You see, we had a meeting-place south of here, in case we should be scattered and have to run for it."

He stopped and smiled at the look of wonder in Montgomerie's face.

"We didn't take any chances when we went after you and the company," he continued. "Now, this route we have been taking—have you noticed that we started straight north, but that, after a week, we began to swing to the west, and that now, if we go down this river, we will be going straight south?"

"We have been traveling in a half circle," agreed the factor.

"Of course. The idea was to throw us off, especially back there on Narrow Lake, and that other lake where they ducked off to the west instead of keeping straight on. McCarthy and the others have been circling back to this place where we were to meet. And I'll bet Jean is there when he gets there. We've got to beat him. Come on!"

"But how would Jean get there first, and how would she get out of that secret lake?" demanded Montgomerie as he began to help pack up.

"That's another of our secrets, another precaution we took in case you found us," Angus laughed. "Back of camp there was a trail over the ridge to the river two miles beyond. Canoes and grub were cached near the river, and the squaws took Jean out that

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way and headed straight west, and a little north, for the secret meeting-place we had selected. It would be just like McCarthy to have all those plans made, especially with the fear of you upon him."

"Hurry!" cried Montgomerie as he lashed the pack and carried it to the water. "They think they've thrown us off the track, and we're not far behind them. We can win out yet."

The swift river carried them toward the south, and the remainder of the day they paddled steadily. At the suggestion of Angus, Montgomerie watched the stream as far ahead as possible, while he confined his attention to both banks for signs of a camp.

But dusk came, and they were still pushing on without seeing anything that would tell them the fugitives were ahead. Both men were tired, and the river was becoming swifter and with occasional rips. But they decided to keep on in the darkness, for time was now more precious than ever before.

BOTH saw the fire at the same moment as they whirled around a sharp bend. It was not more than half a mile ahead, and Montgomerie stopped paddling instantly.

Neither spoke as Angus turned the canoe shoreward and they began to creep nearer in the more quiet water. But the excitement of each increased, despite his efforts to restrain himself, and they twitched and turned in their places as the light ahead became brighter.

At last, when the fire was a quarter of a mile away, Angus brought the canoe up along the bank, and both men stepped out, their rifles in their hands. The canoe was drawn up, and then without whispered plans they slipped into the brush and began to make their way to the breeds' camp.

Behind the canoe they found a ravine which led back from the river, and they went up this for fifty yards before turning down stream. As they tried to climb out, however, they found the side perpendicular and about ten feet high.

"We'll have to go back a ways," whispered Angus as he slid to the bottom after an unsuccessful attempt to reach the top. "That side is straight up. We want to be careful of it coming back, especially if we should be in a hurry. A man would get a nasty fall on these rocks in the dark."

Nearer the river they found a way up and began to work their way through the brush toward the fire they had seen from the canoe. All the hatred and anger and desire for revenge of the three weeks behind them were concentrated in that short stalk through the black forest, and it was with difficulty that they were able to move slowly and quietly. There was that growing eagerness, an eagerness which at times almost swept them from their feet, to rush into the camp and strike and shoot and trample until each of the four men lay lifeless.

But they restrained themselves, and at last, pushing aside a spruce sapling, they saw the camp before them. Neither was surprised to find only McCarthy and his band around the fire. The leader alone sat before the blaze. The others, weary from the long chase, had thrown themselves down and evidently were asleep.

As Angus looked, satisfied, once more in control of himself, he felt the factor stir suddenly. Just in time he reached out and grasped his arm. With a grip almost equal to that of which Montgomerie himself was capable, he wrenched at the muscles until he felt the body relax.

Then, with a final jerk, he indicated the direction of the canoe, and both began to crawl back as they had come.

"You're not to be trusted," whispered Angus angrily when they were far enough from the camp to speak. "You'll ruin our chances."

"I couldn't help it, lad. They were all there, and we could have finished them."

"Yes, and missed Jean. We've got to let them live until they lead us to her. She'll be somewhere on the big lake at the mouth of the river, but only McCarthy knows exactly where."

Montgomerie's contrition turned to anger, anger because of his own lack of self-control, and he pushed ahead of Angus in the darkness. The younger man followed more slowly, for he knew the necessity for caution. Once he heard the factor ahead of him and cursed softly.

The sound of the factor's retreat told Angus that he was working toward the higher ground. Suddenly he remembered the steep-sided ravine. Montgomerie, in his heedlessness, was going straight for it, and toward a point where the walls were high.

Angus pressed forward as quickly as he could without making too much noise.

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Once he ventured a low call, but, when he listened, he could not hear anything ahead of him. Now, thoroughly worried, he went faster, even when he knew that he was getting close to the ravine himself.

Then came the sound of crashing brush directly in front of him. A sapling snapped with a sharp crack, and then all was still.

CAUTIOUSLY now, Angus moved forward until he felt the edge of the ravine. He bent over and whispered:

"Old fellow! Are you there?"

There was no sound.

Angus lowered himself over the edge and dropped. As soon as he struck he began to feel about him in the darkness, and the first thing his hand struck was Montgomerie's shoulder. He felt of the factor's face. One hand was warm and wet.

"Old fellow," he whispered. "Are you hurt?"

There was no answer.

Angus struck a match and its light showed the factor lying before him, a cut along the side of his head. The eyes were closed, but the breast rose and fell slowly.

As the match burned his fingers, Angus arose and went down the ravine toward the river and the canoe, where he got a pail from the pack, filled it with water and hurried back. The factor lay as he had left him.

He slushed water over Montgomerie's face and, with the light of another match, examined the wound. It was not deep, rather a glancing cut that had lifted the scalp which bled freely.

As Angus was binding it up, he felt the factor stir beneath him.

"What happened?" he whispered.

"You fell, and your head's cut open. You'll be all right soon. Take a drink of this," and he held the pail to Montgomerie's lips.

"Feel better now?" he asked after a moment. "Can you get up?"

"If you help me. And this had to happen now!"

"You'll be all right in the morning."

He lifted the other to a sitting position and then to his feet. Montgomerie took one step and went in a heap to the rocks.

"My ankle!" he whispered between tight teeth. "It's twisted. It won't bear me."

"Lie where you are, then," said Angus. "I'll be back soon."

He hurried out of the ravine to the river and into the canoe. Up-stream and out he paddled until he could see the camp-fire. The blaze was dying, and he could barely make out the bodies of the men beside it. McCarthy was just lying down. They had not heard the noise of the factor's fall.

Back to the shore Angus paddled, and then, with the pack and the pail again filled with water, he returned to where he had left Montgomerie.

"How are you?" he asked.

"It's just beginning to hurt, and I'm pretty dizzy."

"They're all asleep, and we can build a fire in here without their seeing it. It's too far away for them to hear, and they'll be sleeping sound tonight."

In the light of the fire he quickly kindled, Angus made a careful examination of Montgomerie's injuries. The big man had simply stepped off into the ravine, and his great weight had brought hurts which another might have escaped.

As he began to remove the moccasin and stocking from the injured leg, he heard a slight moan and turned to find that Montgomerie had fainted.

It was as he wished, and, working quickly, he soon had the ankle bound. He set tea to boil, bathed the wound on Montgomerie's head and bandaged it with the now empty flour-sack.

Then he prepared a quick meal, for they had not eaten since their start on the river at noon, and waited for the factor to recover consciousness.

The minutes slipped by, the fire died down, and at last Angus, exhausted, dropped to sleep.

It was still dark when Montgomerie opened his eyes. For a moment he did not realize where he was, but the first movement of his body brought the situation back to him instantly. Then he attempted to rise, but could not. The strength was gone from the great muscles, his head throbbed, and there was a dizzy haze in his brain.

As he lay back, helpless, he heard the heavy breathing of Angus and put out his hand.

"Wake up, lad!" he whispered, tugging at the leg of the other's trousers.

Angus was up at once.

"How do you feel now?" he asked as he reached for the kettle of cold tea which he had placed ready. "Take a drink of this."

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"It helped," said Montgomerie after a long draft, "but I'm out of it, lad."

"I knew that when I saw the ankle."

"And that means Jean is lost!"

The thought proved a violent stimulant, and the factor struggled to a sitting position, but only to fall back again.

"I can't go on," he almost sobbed. "I can't, and they'll be starting soon. It's getting lighter now."

"You can travel if I can get you into the canoe," encouraged Angus. "And I can manage that. We'll keep after them anyhow."

"I'd only be in the way, and, besides, it would mean one man against the four of them. I'm useless now, and it's too much for you."

"It's not!" exclaimed the other decisively. "It's only a chance I'd like to have. See here, old fellow. I'll leave you here, down where you can get to water, and, as soon as they start, I'll be after them. Today should see the end of it."

"But, lad, you can't against the four."

"I can. The only thing, I don't like to leave you here this way. It's the only chance for her, old fellow, but, if anything should happen to me, you'd die here like a trapped fox."

"Never mind me!" exclaimed Montgomerie, grasping the other's hand and pressing it quickly. "You'll do it, lad. I believe you will."

He had caught the determination and the enthusiasm of the younger man, but, as he looked at his companion, an expression of gentleness and of growing pride crept into his eyes. When he spoke again it was quietly, hesitatingly.

"Lad, you might not come back. Something might happen. Will you do me a favor before you go, for you'll have to be going soon?"

"Sure, old fellow. What is it?"

"Tell me where you came from, and," he faltered, stopped and then asked suddenly, "who was your father?"

Instantly a cloud passed over the other's face.

"He was a company man," he answered harshly and with a hatred behind the words so intense the factor's eyes fell.

"And his name?" he whispered.

"Thank God, I never knew it. My mother would never tell. I have always been known by her name, her name before she married him."

"And your mother?"

"She has been dead fifteen years," he answered gently.

For a long time the factor was silent. Then he turned his head and said:

"Tell me, lad, why have you been making these attacks on the company? You haven't stolen. You have just caused all the damage you could."

Angus looked at his companion curiously. What did he know? What was he driving at? Had he guessed the truth? He waited before he spoke, and then the anger was gone from his voice.

"I might as well tell you," he began. "It's because I hated the company and every one connected with it. It was not what the company had done to me, but what it had done to my mother, and, before she died, I made up my mind that, when I was a man, I would make the company suffer as greatly, if possible, as she had suffered.

"Her husband was a company man, a trader, I think she said. He went where the company sent him, and, when she did not wish to go so far into the wilderness, he went anyhow. He put the company first. It broke her heart, and when I was born she went down to the mission at Rainbow Lake. We lived there until she died.

"I saw her grieving herself to death, even when I was a boy, and always I hated the company because it had sent my father away, and I hated him because he had gone when the company ordered. She wrote him, asking him to come back, but he never did. I never saw him; she never saw him again, and she died of a broken heart, there at the mission."

"Then?" asked the factor when Angus paused.

"I ran away with a free-trader and came into this country. I was ten years old then, and I have never been back."

There was a groan from Montgomerie, and Angus knew it was not from his ankle. In the gray dawn he looked sharply at the injured man's face, and the deep lines, the drawn features, the hopeless, pain-filled eyes, aroused his pity. But, before he could speak, Montgomerie turned, and, looking straight at him, asked:

"And you never knew—never knew about your mother?"

"Knew! What do you mean?"

"Knew that she was insane, had been

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from the time of your birth? Knew that she was a patient, not a boarder, at the mission? Didn't you know that your father did come to see her and you, when you were two years old, and that his coming made her so violent he never dared to come again? Didn't you know that her malady was mild, and confined to the one subject—the company?

"Her father was a trader for the company, and he was killed doing the company's work. When you were born there was a shock from which she never recovered. They tried to take you away, but, as when your father visited her, she became violent, and it was thought best to leave you with her for a time. My God, lad, and you were allowed to hear all that, to believe it, not to know the truth!"

Angus, tense, his words snapping, leaned toward the factor.

"How did you know all that?" he demanded.

"How did I know? Can I ever know anything else? It was burned in too deep for a thousand years to wipe out, burned in by the loneliness, the loss, the hunger for —don't you see, laddie? I'm your father!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE LONE FIGHT

FOR a long time Angus Lalonde stared at the man lying before him. Once he tried to speak, but the words choked far down in his throat. The thoughts, the beliefs, the ambitions of a lifetime, had suddenly been tumbled from the shrine where he had placed them.

The mother, whose memory had been the sustaining cause of his every action since her death, suddenly became a vague impression of the past. The father, for whom he had only had the most intense hatred, began slowly to take new form, for he still could not bring himself to believe that he was the man he had grown to love in the last three weeks.

It was Montgomerie who broke the silence.

"I searched all Canada for you, laddie, but there never was a trace until that morning I saw you come out of your cabin. I knew you instantly, knew you because you looked as I always thought you would look, as your mother looked. Then Penwarden told me your name was Angus Lalonde. You were named Angus after my father, and Lalonde was your mother's name.

"That's why I sent the men away, why I stayed and tried to get you to quit, why I offered to fight it out alone with you, tried to give you every chance."

Somehow, Angus believed every word the factor had said. Not once did the shadow of a doubt cross his mind. Still he could not bring himself to realize the truth, could not rouse his mind to activity after the shock of what he had just heard.

When he did recover, it was with a full comprehension of the entire situation. Characteristically, he drove straight to the important thing.

"Jean!" he said, springing to his feet. "The rest can wait. Come! Let me get you to my back so I can carry you."

Tenderly he lifted the factor to a sitting position and then to his one foot. From there it was easy to get under him and bear him down to the river bank.

"They're just leaving," he whispered as he ran back from a bend around which he had gone to reconnoiter. "I'll leave you all the grub. There's plenty of driftwood, and you can get anything from the pack."

He started at once for the canoe, the factor watching him wistfully. Then he stopped suddenly and wheeled. Three springs, and he was back at the factor's side.

"Good-by, dad," he whispered as he gripped the other's hand. "Good luck, and don't worry. We can't lose out now."

Montgomerie, lying on a blanket, saw him dart down-stream, saw the vigor of his paddle strokes, the great muscles of his back bulging and relaxing beneath his shirt.

Then he was gone.

Despite the pain, despite the dizziness and the weakness, despite the imminence of death from starvation and exhaustion, for there was no possible chance of his being rescued if Angus did not return, Montgomerie smiled. A wave of happiness greater than he had ever known before passed over him. He was bathed in it, submerged in its gentle flood. The loneliness of a lifetime, the sorrow and the hunger and the sense of loss, which had never left him before, were gone.

He had regained his son. The boy he had last seen as a child, just beginning to run about the mission yard, had returned to him. And he was a son such as the Iron

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Factor would desire. Thoroughly of the northland, a man's man through the six feet of his magnificent body, he was his ideal.

And, besides, he had shown the other, the sterner, the greater, qualities. He did not know what it meant to quit; he had a brain that matched his body, and, best of all, he would sacrifice anything to an ideal. The hours passed as Montgomerie thought over and over their close association of the last three weeks, of this youth he had come to love and of the affection of the other for him, and not once did the smile fade from his face.

IN THE meantime Angus was darting down the swift stream in pursuit of the four breeds. He now entered upon the last and the most difficult part of the long journey. He must keep close to McCarthy and his men, but he must never show himself. He must reach the big lake soon after they did, and from there he must make certain their course and let them get well in advance before he himself could venture onto the open stretches.

One thing was in his favor: The fugitives did not believe they were followed. They were confident that they had thrown the others off the course. Their remaining a day at the portage into the river showed it. Their unguarded camp-fire on the bank of the stream was evidence of their lack of fear.

Twice, as Angus peered around a bend before daring to go on, he caught sight of the two canoes down long stretches. Evidently they were not traveling fast, and he was glad of the opportunity to relax his own efforts.

It was noon when he reached the lake. The river made a sharp bend just at the mouth, and from this vantage-point he was able to look out over the greater body of water.

A mile down the east shore he saw the two canoes of the breeds. They were not so close together now. One lagged a little, and Angus thought he understood. McCarthy, nearing the place where the squaws were to meet him with Jean, was hurrying.

After a few minutes Angus saw them turn a point far down the shore, and immediately he was after them. From the distant point he again reconnoitered and saw that he had gained a little, and that the others were continuing down the shore.

For the better part of the afternoon this went on. The lake was deeply indented on the east side, and the breeds were traveling from point to point, evidently bound for a spot far down toward the south end.

Just before six o'clock, as Angus was looking through the brush to pick up the other canoes again, he suddenly drew back his head.

The chase was over. More than three weeks of excessive endeavor, hardship and anxiety were ended. There remained now only the final struggle, and, though he was one against four, and the squaws, Angus was eager.

For, across a little bay from the point on which he was lying, he saw two tepees set back from a sand beach. Meat was drying on a rack, and a kettle hung from a tripod over the fire. Evidently the squaws had arrived some days in advance, their shorter journey across the diameter of the circle making this possible.

The two canoes were just drawing to shore. Above them, on the bank, stood the two Indian women. Six! He counted them quickly. That was all.

Then the flap of the teepee to the right was lifted slightly, and a head appeared. At that distance Angus could not tell whether it was the head of a man or a woman, of a white person or a red. But he felt confident it was Jean.

As he looked the flap dropped back, and Angus watched the others. He could see McCarthy walking first up the bank, see him speak to the squaws. He waited breathlessly, but, with only a glance at the teepee on the right, the breed walked across to the camp-fire and sat down. The others soon joined him, while the squaws began the final preparations of the meal.

When all were busy eating, Angus studied the situation and made his plans. It would be an hour before darkness, and, until darkness came, it would be useless for him to do anything. In the meantime, he must perfect every detail of his attack, become familiar with the ground and also plan his retreat, especially if he were able to bring Jean with him.

For the breeds themselves he had only contempt. He had been with them too much not to know their cowardice. He had two other strong factors in his favor, two on

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which he counted most: The men were weary from the long chase, a chase on which they had not had any too much to eat. They would be low in spirits as they were low in vitality, and no two of them would make a man.

Then, there was the element of complete surprise, for there was no evidence that they expected an attack from any quarter. And this element would be the greater, because, coupled with it, would be the half-breed's superstitious fear of the supernatural. For they would account for the sudden appearance of the "Evil Spirit" in no other way.

Angus slipped back through the brush to his canoe and carried it to the shelter of the spruce farther up the bank. Then, rifle in hand, he went down to the base of the point and began to cross over to the head of the bay around which he must travel to reach the breeds' camp.

Twice, when on the other side, he peered out to see that the others were still eating. Their first good meal evidently would be a long one. Wolves eat the same way.

When he had skirted the bay and was on the point on which the breeds were camped, Angus pressed on across it to see what lay beyond. He found the point was short and rounding and sufficiently wide so that he could slip through the brush until he was directly behind the tepees.

He waited until darkness before attempting this. Then, as he went closer, he looked out occasionally to see what was happening in the camp, perhaps to catch a glimpse of Jean. But he could see only the four men and the two squaws, still around the camp-fire.

WHEN the daylight had waned so that the blaze of the fire was becoming brighter and beginning to throw shadows on the trees behind it, Angus crept toward the end of the point. By so doing he would be without chance of retreat should things go against him, but he gave that only a passing thought. He was in the fight to stay, and the surprise would be the greater if his rush came from that direction. Besides, he could more quickly get between Jean and the others.

When he had reached the spot he had chosen, he crept as close up behind Jean's tepee as he dared. From a screen of spruce he was able to see the camp-fire and every one around it. The men were smoking now, and, with the squaws, were discussing the features of the flight through the wilderness. He could even hear their voices and occasionally catch words.

It was just about dark enough for the attack, but Angus waited. McCarthy, still impressed with his new dignity as leader, again sat a little apart from the others. Only occasionally did he take his pipe from his mouth to speak.

At last he arose, looked over the camp-site and then turned slowly toward Jean's tepee. The conversation stopped. Every one watched him.

A squaw giggled. One of the men laughed. McCarthy did not turn or stop. He walked straight on until, when ten feet from the rough birch-bark shelter of the white girl, he suddenly crumpled in a heap.

Angus's first shot had been carefully aimed. His next three were fired at random into the group around the fire. After the fourth shot, and he had pumped them as fast as he could work his arm, he sprang to his feet.

With a shrill whoop and then a roar, he dashed straight for the blaze. He roared again, and a squaw screamed.

"The Windigo!" cried one of the men. "The Windigo!"

Angus did not stop. He knew that only by taking immediate advantage of the shock of surprise could he win.

The next instant he was beside the camp-fire. Right and left with his clubbed rifle he struck. One breed, the one he had feared the most, a big man, reached out with the only weapon he had, one of the squaw's long butcher-knives. But the rifle barrel broke his forearm before he could strike.

One of the shots fired at random into the group had mortally wounded another, and the remaining breed had run to the canoes. Angus, who had been careful to keep four cartridges in his rifle, fired as the man was about to push off, and he fell across the craft into the water.

The young white man now turned to the squaws. Like a cow-puncher who has no fear for an angry, charging steer, but dreads the open-eyed rush of a cow, the man of the northland knows that in the squaw rather than in the Indian he has the most to dread. With her long butcher-knife, her anger and her strength, she is a formidable adversary.

The two women Angus faced, however,

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were huddled helplessly beside the fire. There was no fight in them. Had they not been told that the Windigo was dead? If so, was not this his ghost? And who could fight a spirit.

Angus stepped back, his rifle cocked, so that he could command the scene.

"Jean!" he called. "Jean! Come out!"

He did not dare turn toward the teepee in which he believed she was hidden, and he waited for her answer.

But there was no sound.

"Jean!" he called again, this time a little anxiously. "Jean! It's all right now!"

There was only silence in the teepee. He risked a glance behind him. McCarthy still lay before the door. The flap was still down. Fearfully, he wheeled upon the squaws and addressed them in Ojibway. They only shook their heads and looked in wonder at the girl's shelter.

Angus started toward them, his rifle aimed. They cowered down before him. One shrieked.

And then every head turned toward the brush behind the camp. A twig had snapped. The saplings rustled, and Jean stepped into the circle of firelight.

"Jean!" cried Angus.

She only stood looking at him questioningly.

"I've come for you, Jean. Don't you see?"

"I expected you," she said coldly. "I knew that was part of your plan."

"My plan!" he exclaimed. "I had no—Jean! You don't mean that you thought I sent those breeds for you?"

"What else was I to think?"

"Does that look like it?" he demanded, pointing to McCarthy's body at the door of her teepee. "Does that?" and he indicated the wounded breed beside the fire, the body of the dead one in the water. "Don't you know that dad and I have been searching for you every minute since McCarthy got you?"

Jean stared at him bewildered. Then, with a little cry, she ran toward him.

"Dad, did you say? Did you call him dad? Oh, Angus, you know, and it's all right! It's all right!"

She fell to her knees before him and leaned back against one of the logs the squaws had provided for seats about the fire, her face buried in her hands.

Angus, perplexed, stood looking helplessly at her bowed head, at the trembling shoulders, listened to her sobs and choking cries.

"Jean! Don't!" he whispered. "What is it?"

"I'm so glad, so glad!" she cried, looking up at him, her eyes smiling through her tears. "So glad for him and—and for you."

CHAPTER XIV

THE RETURN

THAT night Jean and Angus paddled away from the camp that had become a slaughtering-place. To the squaws they left the wounded breed and the dead bodies of the other three. They took some of the drying meat, Angus leaving in its place an admonition that the survivors get as far away as the remainder of the short Summer would permit.

Then, both paddling, they started out in the darkness for the north end of the lake and the mouth of the river.

In response to Jean's eager, excited questions, Angus told what had happened since he had left her camp that night nearly a month before. Then from Jean he learned that, as he had guessed, she had been taken from the secret lake by the squaws when his father had made his blind rush into their camp, and that, in accordance with McCarthy's directions, they had traveled west until they had reached the meeting-place.

"But, I thought you were in that teepee tonight," said Angus.

"I was, but, while they were eating, I cut a slit in the back and crept into the brush."

"What were you going to do?"

"I don't know. Anything to get away. And then, when I had crawled quite a way from camp, I saw you creeping toward it. I didn't understand, for I thought — I thought—you'll forgive me, won't you, for believing what I did of you, but I couldn't think anything else?"

"Of course," he answered cheerfully, "but how about your first opinion of me, and your ability to tell a bad man the minute you see him? You changed that."

"I never changed it. It was always the same, only, when I used my head I—I thought you were bad, but, when I——"

She faltered and stopped speaking.

"Jean," Angus whispered, "do you mean that, when you used your heart, you didn't

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believe I was? Do you mean your heart told you one thing and your head another?"

"Don't!" she cried, beginning to paddle swiftly. "You mustn't! You mustn't—not yet!"

"Not yet," Angus repeated to himself. "Not yet."

Sometime he could ask. Sometime she would answer. It was enough, and he began to shoot the canoe northward in the darkness, a strength in his stroke, despite his weariness, that he had never known before.

They camped that night far up the lake, and the next morning entered the river. It was evening when they turned a bend and saw a tiny column of smoke far ahead.

"He's there!" cried Jean, who, from the bow, had seen it first.

"And he's better," said Angus, who knew the fire meant life and safety.

But, as they fought against the current more sturdily than they had through the long day, he suddenly ceased paddling. Jean turned in wonder, and the face behind her prompted the question:

"What is it, Angus?"

"I just thought, for the first time," he said slowly and despondently, "of what it means, my going back to him. Don't you see, Jean? I have been attacking the company. I have been in the wrong. He was sent to get me, and now his work is only half completed."

"Nonsense," she said. "Look what you have done in the last month. What could he have done without you?"

"Without me there never would have been anything to do," he replied. "You would never have been in danger, never have taken such a risk. Don't you see, Jean? I'm still the man he was sent here to get, and—don't you see what dad must do?"

Jean did not answer. She had spent her life in the confidence of the Iron Factor, and she knew better than any, his allegiance to duty, his allegiance to the Great Company. Its service was his religion, and in its service he had been steeped through the long years of his life.

Her silence told Angus what he had expected. After a moment he began to paddle slowly.

"I've got to pay," he said, "even if everything has been a mistake. I've got to pay, and I'll let him set the price."

MONTGOMERIE saw them coming and crawled to the edge of the water to wave to them. His joy was pitiful, and that evening, as the three sat about the camp-fire, he was almost child-like in his pleasure. The long years of repression were broken down, and he laughed and chattered without restraint.

The next morning, with Montgomerie propped comfortably in the center of the canoe and Angus and Jean paddling, the long journey to Lynx Head began. They went downstream to the big lake and on past the camp where the long chase had ended. They kept well out from shore and did not stop. They could see the teepees, the two squaws busy over the camp-fire, the breed with the broken arm watching them.

At the end of the lake they entered another river and two days later reached a small post of the Great Company. There they remained until Montgomerie was able to stand the difficult travel east to Lynx Head.

It was Fall when they arrived. In all the journey Montgomerie had not in any way referred to the former relations of Angus and the company. Not once had he mentioned the gang of outlaws of which his son had been the leader.

Jean and Angus spoke of it several times, wondered what was in his mind, what he intended to do. Jean, with her intimate knowledge of the man, could offer little hope. She knew his firm allegiance to the company, how he always placed it first, and his sternness and relentlessness made her fear for the young man.

She did not tell any of this to Angus, but he felt it in her silence, in the lack of sincerity when she tried to cheer him.

The evening they paddled across the lake before the post, they saw the door of the store open and the trader hurry down to the shore. Other company employees gathered at the top of the bank.

The canoes grounded.

"Mr. Montgomerie!" cried Penwarden excitedly. "We had given you up long ago. We thought you were dead. What happened to the Windigo and his gang?"

As he asked the question he saw Angus in the other canoe. His little eyes widened in astonishment and then in exultation.

"I see!" he exclaimed gleefully. "You've got——"

"You see nothing," said the Iron Factor

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sternly as he stepped ashore. "You never did see anything, Penwarden. Do you understand that?"

He looked steadily into the trader's astonished eyes for a moment and then turned to Angus.

"Come here, lad," he called. "Mr. Penwarden, I want you to know my son, Angus Montgomerie. Angus and I between us, though it was mostly Angus, have cleaned out the Windigo and his band. There's one of them left, with a broken arm, and a couple of squaws. But I don't think they'll trouble us again."

Angus, as bewildered as the trader, extended his hand awkwardly. The little Englishman took it hesitatingly and then dropped it quickly.

"Angus is going to be in charge of the next brigade that goes out, Penwarden," continued Montgomerie. "The Windigo will not bother him."

He started up the bank, Penwarden at his side. Jean, who had been listening to the factor, remained with Angus.

"Did you hear?" she whispered excitedly. "It's all right. Penwarden is the only one who ever saw you, and he won't dare say anything. And you're going to take out a brigade, Angus."

He looked at her happy face for a moment, stepped quickly toward her, and then as suddenly drew back.

"Now, Jean," he whispered, "I get a fresh start, the right start, and I can ask what your heart said."

"No! No!" she cried, extending her hands as if to push him away. "No, Angus," and she smiled tauntingly, "not yet!"

"But," he began.

"Not yet, not until you come back with the brigade." And when he saw her eyes he knew what the answer would be when he did ask.

The Rhyme of the RED-HEADS

by

ALBERT JAY COOK

THE battle was done, and the cavemen were clustered around his bed;
He lay by the fire in the cavern, a cleft in his tawny head;
The chief of the brawny clansmen who warred with the tree-men gang;
The leader of muscled fighters whose law was the tooth and fang.
And saber-tooths snarled in the jungle and club-footed mammoths screamed;
And reptiles were rippling the swamp-top, when pallid the moonlight beamed.
But still on his couch of soft branches the fur-covered chieftain lay,
Till, stooping to him in the darkness, the cave-dwellers heard him say:

"Ye men of the caves and the cañons,
I charge thee when I am gone,
To hack on the walls of the cliff-side,
That passers may look upon;
That legend may tell of the battle,
The tale of the ones who dare—
I charge that ye carve with the flint-stone
'The red-headed men were there.' "

Oh, dark was the day in the city, black-draped were the window-sills,
And plaintive the grief of the people who lived on the Seven Hills;
The story had come of the Britons, the tale of the Gaulish hordes,
That threatened to conquer the Romans, the men of the two-edge swords;
And not till the Belgæ were routed, the Britons pursued and slain,
The Goths and the Lombards vanquished, did Cæsar return again;
The ranks of his legions depleted, he tramped down the Pontine Way,
And watching his warriors passing, the Senators heard him say:

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"Ye men of the conquering empire
That stretched from sea to sea,
Ye men that have gall-yoked the desert,
The mountains and plains for me;
Come tell to the wondering people,
Why come ye with ranks so bare?"
And loudly the legioneers answered:
"The red-headed men were there."

The Calif of Bagdad was praying, alone by the Moslem door,
And followers of the Mohammed were chanting the Prophet's lore;
In sackcloth and ashes the Arabs were wailing a dismal song—
The Franks and the Saxons and English had done them a grievous wrong;
The Giaours had come from the West-land and captured a holy town,
And high in the City of David were wearing a ruling crown.
The Calif salaamed to the East, where the tomb of the Great One lay,
And high on the edge of the platform the muezzin heard him pray:

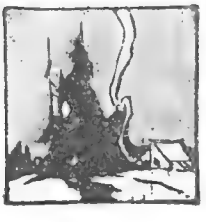
"O Allah, the Father of Mankind,
Destroyer of Giaour boasts;
Mohammed, the Prophet of Mecca,
The Leader of Islam hosts—
Forgive us, the Sons of the Desert,
Our grief and our loud despair,
For know ye, the God of our Fathers,
The red-headed men were there."

The shrapnel was bursting and maiming, the country with dead was sown;
And shell-fire was drowning the rifle and clattering Maxim's tone.
The barbed-wire was stretched and entangled, the bayonet glittered and gleamed,
And far on the rim of the battle the mud of the trenches steamed;
And I, as a war correspondent, a public at home to serve,
Went up to the line of the fighting—it certainly tried my nerve.
I wandered through bomb-proofs and dugouts, I felt there was something queer;
And then, like a shot, came the answer: no red-headed men were here.

I questioned a clean-shaven sergeant,
And asked for the flame-top bunch
Who'd rather, I thought, fight a battle,
Than eat at a king's own lunch.
He led me afar to a hillock,
And pointed me out in the glare
A sprinkling of mounds and of gravestones:
"The red-headed men are there."

THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS



NOT being an expert on diving for pearls, I queried a statement in one of J. Allan Dunn's stories when reading it in manuscript and Mr. Dunn not only answered the query satisfactorily but took the time to write out for the Camp-Fire some information on pearl-diving that will be of particular interest to those of you who have no first-hand knowledge on the subject.

I enclose something that you may like for Camp-Fire, arising from your question as to a man diving naked in sixteen fathoms. The average pearling yarn (including my own), is bare of actual pearling details. Some day I'll put them into a story.

BUT, in the meantime, there are two processes of getting the pearls. The free pearls are the more valuable, and can be easily found in the oyster, when opened fresh. Some diving companies divide their shell with the native divers 75—25.

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This division is sometimes made at the time of coming to the surface, or, more usually, the shell is piled and rotted out till the shells open. After death and decomposition the soft parts are searched for gems, and the shell cleaned for mother-of-pearl.

Diving-suits and dredges are tabu in some fields. Chinese fisheries give the lagoons ten years to recover. A pearl-shell is not profitable for mother-of-pearl until it is five years old; at six the deposit is doubled in value; at seven, doubled again. No shell under five holds a pearl.

ONLY one pearl in one thousand averages a gem of any account. Only the rough-shelled oysters carry pearls. The variety *Avicula margaritifera* is coarsely laminated, dull olive to smoke-color. It grows from ten to eighteen inches across. It is found from 10—generally 15—to 20 fathoms down, anchored to coral masses.

RED SEA and Persian Gulf are steady fisheries with the market at Bagdad. Bombay is the market for Indian Ocean pearls, usually yellow. Australian pearls are small, but very brilliant. The best of all come from the Sulus. Ceylon has ten government fisheries. They are scattered all over the South Seas, with Tahiti the central market for export to Amsterdam, Hamburg, Petrograd, Paris and London.

Price goes by weight, size and symmetry. White outrank all. There are also green, yellow, pink, gray and black. Pears rank lower than globulars.

IN THE Persian Gulf men dive naked, riding in a triangular frame of wood, weighted on the lower bar with a big shot. A basket is on his neck, cotton in nose and ears, his body rubbed with oil. He carries a knife, to loosen oysters and fight sharks. The frame is hauled up and down in about two minutes. He makes fifty trips on an average, seventy-five oysters to the trip.

In the South Seas, divers often work by contract, being paid by the ton for their shells, as graded into three qualities. Often they are allowed all the pearls, and usually sell them to the company.

They swim down, first locating their shell clump by a water-glass, a hollow cube about sixteen inches square at the top, twelve at the bottom and a foot deep.

Women also dive. They wear only a loin cloth, and carry a wide-meshed bag of sennet (fiber) for the shells. In the lagoons they seldom worry about sharks, but carry a pearl-shell to loosen the oysters. Often they wear a cotton mitten on one hand.

THEY go down feet first for about two fathoms, then turn over and swim to the bottom, lying there while they work. Fifteen fathoms is an ordinary depth. They often stay under over two minutes. Between dives they inflate their lungs, sitting on the side of the boat, exhaling it with a whistle. When they come up, they do so in an erect posture, from the bottom, shooting up at a great speed, waist high from the surface.

There is a record dive of 23 fathoms (138 feet).

The U. S. Fish Commission Ship *Albatross* records dives in 17 fathoms (102 feet), where the man stayed under two minutes and forty seconds, seemed to suffer no discomfort and soon went down again. This in the South Seas.

I HAVE purposely left out actual localities and commercial information, but I thought Camp-Fire readers might like to know how a pearl is brought up and found.

Nearer home there are extensive fisheries, at Panama and in Lower California aside from mussels. Abalone pearls are mentioned, but I have never seen, nor authentically heard of, anything save "blisters," attached for their entire diameter to the mother shell.—J. ALLAN DUNN.

WE USED to be a nation who could shoot, and shoot well. We're not any more. In certain sections the percentage of those who can shoot is high, but these sections are the thinly populated ones.

A letter from one of its members tells me about the Charleston (S. C.) Rifle Club (civilian). It is a very valuable step toward practical national defense, and so is of more than passing interest to good Americans.

IT WAS organized August 30th of last year, and is affiliated with the National Rifle Association. The War Department furnishes free 120 rounds of ammunition per member and one Krag rifle for every five members. As fast as members qualify as "experts" or better, an additional rifle is issued to each member so qualifying. In addition, the members may purchase Krag rifles for $5 each, or service model Springfields for about $13 each. They have ranges of 200 to 1000 yards at Mt. Pleasant, 300 yards at Ft. Moultrie, and an indoor range of seventy-five feet. There is no military obligation in the Charleston club.

THERE should be a rifle club in every town of size in the United States. If your town hasn't one, why not organize one? If it has one or more, why not join, or organize still another? I'm ashamed to admit that at this writing I know no more about the National Rifle Association than the "World Almanac" tells me, but I'm taking steps to learn more, and on the face of things it would seem the logical thing for a rifle club to join it.

I suppose some pacifist will now draw the conclusion that this magazine and I are in some way subsidized or egged on by a powder or arms company. Neither of us is, but I know of no way of proving it off-hand, so we'll let it go as it lies. I'm not much interested whether I'm under pacifist suspicion provided I can do a little toward promoting rifle practise among our "citizenry trained to arms," since said citizenry

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as a whole are very far from being trained to arms.

The address of the National Rifle Association is 1502 H Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

Why don't you get your friends together and form a local rifle club?

FROM a soldier at the front comes a statement of why our identification-cards are valuable in addition to identity-discs and other similar devices used by the warring armies:

I am writing to take advantage of your offer in the matter of identification-cards. Almost every time I pick up a copy of *Adventure* I renew my resolution to write you and then—well, the intention runs off onto a siding and stays there till the next train comes. This time, however, it's a through train. The army identity-discs are excellent for their purpose, but mistakes often occur, and apart from delays, the news forwarded to our next of kin is a bare statement to the effect that "So-and-So was killed in action." It then devolves on a pal to give what details are possible, and your identification-system should answer admirably.

I AM with the Canadians in France—Belgium, at present, and have been since Feb. 11, 1915, when the old original first Canadian divisions landed in this mess. So far I have been singularly lucky, having not been either wounded or sick, in spite of some darned close shaves. It is not the first time, as I am a Knight of the Wandering Feet, and hope to be alive to keep on wandering *après la guerre.*

Good luck, *Adventure!*—FRANK A. LANDRIAU, No. 7810, Signals, 1st Can. Inf. Bde., 1st Can. Div., B. E. F., France.

CHARLES BROWN, Jr., entering our pages this month for the first time, follows Camp-Fire custom, and tells about himself and his tale. He was born in San Rafael, Calif., and after a succession of school work, tramping with hoboes through Utah, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming, and newspaper work, one July morning he shipped out of San Francisco.

Life on the sea is one —— plunge after another. The ship I was on plunged down and down and down into the South Seas, where she was wrecked off a lonely little island. She mixed it with a typhoon and took the count. As soon as I got out of the South Seas I sailed over to the Philippine Islands and into Manila. Here I went into the laundry business, running an opposition to Uncle Sam.

I WAS broke all over, and needed money as badly as a horse needs shoes. So I appointed myself a committee of ways and means and went out to raise the necessary amount. Along the banks of the Pasig River I saw little groups of Filipino women washing their clothes. I took one look, and ran all the way back to the docks. Then I began to incubate my idea.

I solicited the sailors for their laundry, emphasizing how cheaply it could be washed by the "Pasig River Laundry." With the first *carramato* load I hurried back to the river banks and hired the women to wash for me all day. That night the clothes were returned, the women paid, and I was flush again.

AFTER I left Manila on a transport, I made a beautiful passage through the China Sea. Most of the way I scrubbed deck. When the transport grew tired of running around northern China she turned and made a bee-line for Nagasaki, Japan. From there I sailed for home, where I found a big dinner cooked, and the folks glad all over because the prodigal son had returned.

After a seven months' preparatory course in San Francisco, I matriculated at the University of California in 1912, and for the next three years specialized in social sciences and journalism. On September 1, 1915, I threw all my belongings into two suit-cases and left California, coming to New York City, where I am writing all day in a little garret-room and attending New York University at night. I am also doing social work in a settlement house.

ABOUT "Red Flannel": I believe that no matter how cruel a man has been to a woman she will *usually* stick by him when he is down and out. This trait in the woman is a peculiar one to me. I think you see it more in the primitive woman than you do in the civilized woman; but it is in both, nevertheless.—CHARLES BROWN, JR.

IF YOU are eligible to the American Legion, have you enrolled for defense? See our Information Directory.

AN APPEAL for information, concerning their son, from the parents of a missing German soldier. I am afraid the data furnished are too scant to result in any definite news of this one man among the fighting millions, but strange things happen and I'm sure that if by chance one of you should be able to furnish any clue he will be glad to do so. Letters can be sent in care of this office or to the address given below.

I am asking the favor of a few minutes' attention on behalf of worried parents who think their only son lost in the now raging war.

Said German soldier, named Emanuel Victor Alma, is or has been a one-year volunteer in the 24th Brandenburg Infantry Regiment, 10th Company. He fought in the battle near Jeinappes, Mons in Belgium, second battle near Framerie, and is reported missing since then by the German Government. The last time he had been recognized, he was riding on a baggage-wagon toward Mons. Since English soldiers broke several times through the German supply-trains, he may have been taken a prisoner or seriously wounded during the battle. In whatever case, I fervently ask you, for the sake

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of the worried parents, to publish an advertisement in the back pages of your magazine, since your magazine is even found in the trenches of the fighting nations. Said soldier spoke perfect English and may have given a last verbal message to his anxious parents.—WILLIAM R. P. BRAND, Navigator H. M., care of Mr. J. Bihler, 1731 N. Talman Ave., Chicago, Ill.

THE foregoing item is remarkable in being, I think, the only word, direct or indirect, that has come to me for the Camp-Fire from the men fighting with the Teutonic Allies in the great war. That this should be so is natural enough when you consider that any magazine reaches only those who can read the language in which it is printed and that the English-speaking men on the side of the Teutons are very few in comparison to the Canadians, English, Australians, New Zealanders, and so forth on the other side. Added to this are the facts that communication with this country from the Teutonic nations is much more difficult than from the Quadruple Entente, and that the latter's blockading warships make it difficult for Teuton reservists to cross the seas for service.

IT IS natural enough that practically all our Camp-Fire letters should come from only one side of the war, yet I have been both surprised and grateful that not even one of you has questioned our neutrality because of this. All of you, I think, have understood.

THE case is much the same in regard to stories in the magazine. We use few stories of any kind dealing with the present war. We meant to use none, or almost none, but every once in a while one is submitted that seems to us too good not to pass on to you. But of all the war stories submitted to us, for every hundred with Allies as characters there has certainly not been more than one submitted with Teutons as characters. And, of this 1% of war stories submitted, none yet received has seemed up to our fiction standards. Out of the 99% we have found very few.

We're being as neutral as we can without depriving our readers of some good stories. Indeed, we've rejected a good many tales that we'd have taken if they hadn't been war stories.

And, as you know, the stories used have been free from arguments and bitter recriminations.

ONLY one man has questioned our neutrality as to stories and all of the rest of you seem to understand the situation, but it does no harm to make it clear once more that *Adventure* and the "Camp-Fire" are neutral as to war, politics, religion, race and everything else. With the exception that they stand strong for really adequate national defense and, in peace or war, for the kind of American citizenship that is beyond question and beyond doubt and without reservation.

BY WAY of introduction along with their first story in this magazine, Robert E. Pinkerton tells the Camp-Fire how and where he and Mrs. Pinkerton are living—and it is worth hearing. His reference to a photograph is in response to a request of ours.

Atikokan, Ontario, Canada.

A little over three years ago I figured that in the previous five and one-half years I had held forty-two jobs. This did not count the times I had held the same job two or more times. Anyhow, here are some of them: reporter and trapper, sporting editor and cook in a lumber camp, theatrical press-agent and working in a trading-post with only Indians for customers, telegraph editor and fishing for the market, Associated Press editor and guard in the U. S. forest service. Twice I have run a magazine, one a sporting journal, and the other an anti-tuberculosis organ, and in both cases wrote everything, from verses to editorials and ads.

SCATTERED in between I have worked on a farm, bull-cooked on a log drive, worked as a lumber-jack, trapped in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Canada, read copy on several Chicago papers, guided moose hunters, free-lanced among the Sunday papers, driven team across a twenty-six-mile portage, turned out some advertising literature, and, when there was nothing else to do, built log-cabins. No less than six are scattered through the bush.

BUT for the last three and a half years I haven't drawn an envelope or a time-check. I've lived in the same log-cabin all that time, paddled the same canoe, driven the same dog-team, and pounded the same typewriter. Mrs. Pinkerton does the trapping, and, although Bobs is only seven months old, she has a sleeping-robe of real lynx skins, home-caught and home-tanned, so we're sure they're genuine.

It's a hundred miles to a doctor, just as far to a barber, and Bobs has never seen a road, or a farm, or an auto. Yesterday she laughed at the efforts of a deer to swim away from the canoe, and shrieked and kicked at it. She has heard the wolves howling at night, and she was only eight weeks old when she made the journey to the cabin behind a team of huskies. Perhaps she'll have some adventures to tell before long.

I'd send a picture if I had one. Instead, I am sending a film. I would make a print, but the nearest place where I can get paper and chemicals is

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Port Arthur, 150 miles away, and I haven't any just now. It would be some time before I could get them in and get a print off to you.—ROBERT E. PINKERTON.

OUR identification cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

SINCE I gave you our last report on Turtle Bay and whether the Japanese really have there a coaling-station and naval base, and before what I wrote reached your eye in print, the newspapers again took up the matter on the occasion of reported Japanese soldiers in uniform near the United States boundary of Mexico.

I don't know what developments there may be before what I am now writing reaches you, but at last month's Camp-Fire, Albert F. Nathan, of the Los Angeles *Times*, told us he has over 200 photographs, taken by himself during a month at Turtle Bay, and that he saw four Jap cruisers, two Jap and two British Colliers, a wireless station, a huge amount of ammunition and several thousand Jap soldiers in camp on shore. All at Turtle Bay, they claim, merely because the *Asama* had run on a sand-bank.

THAT was over a year ago. What is there now? It will interest you to know that in January one of our number, who was then in Mexico near the east coast, sent a *mozo* clear across Mexico to Turtle Bay to find out. The *mozo* carried a small camera. It is not what you'd call an easy or a safe trip, but the man who sent him knows Mexico and Mexicans, and would not have started him out if there hadn't been a fair chance of his winning through—and back.

Here's hoping! And, for one, I'm anxious to hear the *mozo's* report.

RED-HEADS and gray-heads, here is something to interest you both, especially the latter. Men continue to enroll in the Red-Headed Regiment. Here is another proposal from one of our number, and the more you think it over, the sounder it seems. There are plenty of you, aged from 45 to 55, who are strong and active enough for service and who are already trained soldiers, seasoned under fire. Let's hear from you. Will you join with Major MacFergus in making this practical addition to our country's meager defenses?

I have been decidedly interested in your suggestion about a regiment of red-headed men, but why doesn't somebody propose a regiment of gray-headed men?

I MAKE that proposition in all earnestness and good faith. One of the worst calamities of war is its killing off of the young men of the country. I need not enter into an enumeration of the undesirable things that follow that. Germany, England, France and Russia will not in a century get over the slaughter of their manhood.

Now I know that a young man in many respects makes a better soldier than an old man and yet, given a strong patriotic impulse, an old man may be a mighty good soldier. A man of 50 or 55, whom the recruiting-sergeant would not look at for a moment, may be nevertheless physically fit for a campaign and, if he is killed, the loss to the country is a small fraction of the loss it sustains in the killing of a young man.

I AM of the opinion that there are in the United States a good many thousand men who belong to the class I would place myself in—men considerably past middle life, but fairly fit physically; men who have lived their lives and done most of their life-work; men who realize that the remaining years of life can not be very long in any event and who would be willing enough to invest them all on a very short-term investment, if there were some great incentive; men, many of them, who have looked the war-god in the face before in our own wars or the wars of other countries and were not looked out of countenance very much.

I BELIEVE, not a regiment, but a brigade, of such men could be easily raised and, while they might lack at first the marching ability of a regiment of boys, by the time a campaign was a month old they'd not be very far in the rear. While they might not charge as swiftly as the youngsters, their charge would be mighty formidable when it came home, and would be likely to come home. And such men to hold a desperate position, to stay and die, I believe could be trusted better even than younger men.

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I have had this idea in my head a good while and it seems to me it is worthy of consideration. Why doesn't somebody form a reserve corps of the gray-headed?—MAJOR GUILLERMO MACFERGUS.

NOT only is our Red-Headed Regiment taking form and shape, but the general idea behind it is meeting with splendid response. In addition to Major MacFergus's suggestion of a Gray-Headed Regiment, here are two more letters with more suggestions. The first is from the captain of the Relief H. & L. Co., Pelham (N. Y.) Fire Department:

Why not a Smoke-Eaters Regiment? A regiment composed of Volunteer Firemen and officered by Vol. Firemen who have had military training. There are plenty of them, both ex-regulars and ex-guardsmen. Different counties throughout the State could each have their own Company, drills could be arranged for in some way, with a couple of weeks' field training in the Summer.

There are over 6,000 firemen in Westchester County. Westchester County is not the only county in the State, and N. Y. is not the only State in the Union. What do you think of it?

Personally, I think that if the idea were thoroughly worked out and properly presented, it could be made a success.

I'll do all I can to help.—J. T. D. WEISS.

The second comes from a man who knows what fighting means, and advocates for this country a fighting organization like the famous one in the service of France—a Foreign Legion:

I have been away for quite a while and it was only just recently that I was able to get a look at *Adventure*, so I guess I am hopelessly behind. Please excuse this writing as I am just getting over a rather bad illness, in which I have seen the Pearly Gates once or twice, so am kind of shaky yet. They called it lead-poisoning.

I have been reading about the Red-Headed Regiment and have also heard about the American Legion, and I was just thinking, Why not a Foreign Legion? There are thousands of men who, for some reason or other, have not and will not become citizens, but who would in case of trouble be perfectly ready to fight for this country. I am one myself, and I think there are a good many more like me.

BOTH suggestions, like Major MacFergus's Gray-Headed Regiment and the Highland Brigade suggested by another member of our Camp-Fire, are good ones. All, like the Red-Heads, recognize the tremendous *practical* value of *esprit de corps*, of common characteristics or traditions among the men of a regiment which bind them closely together and make of them a splendid fighting-machine.

Send in your suggestions and advice. At this writing it looks as if there were small chance of any adequate defense measures from Congress. What is done to protect the nation must be done largely by individual citizens. Do your part. If you are eligible to any of the above organizations, send in your name to be enrolled, and then get ready to join with others who do the same and to make these regiments into realities. Seasoned men and green men, both are needed. Send in your name.

IN THE February issue, at the head of Daniel Louis Hanson's story, "A Case in Diplomacy," we made him the author of "The Conquest of the Missouri," "Frontier Ballads," etc., which were written by another of our contributors, Joseph Mills Hanson. It was a stupid mistake and there isn't any point to explaining how we came to make it.

It only makes it all the more stupid to admit that we knew perfectly well which Hanson wrote those two books.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Charles J. Sullivan, having joined *Adventure* with a story for the first time, stands up and introduces himself:

Mine must be a confession rather than a narrative. Within the last year I have written and published several stories about the Philippines, and these have led many editors and readers to credit me with authoritative knowledge of the Islands. These stories have been scened in Luzon, Buluan and Mindoro. I have talked of Cavite and Olongapo and Tarlac and Penang with seeming authority, and in this last tale of the "Drunken God" I have delved into the wilds of Palawan.

A short time ago a story of mine, dealing with the customs of a mysterious tribe in northern Luzon, brought letters to me from several different parts of the country, and all from men who have lived and served in the Philippines. These men wrote in appreciation of my knowledge of what they called the real service life in the Islands, and one old sergeant of marines asked me with what outfit I served in the Kalinga country.

AS A MATTER of fact, I have never seen any of the Philippines, not even on a motion-picture screen. The cruise that brought me nearest to Manila was on a tug about a mile off the Golden Gate.

Yet there is no doubt that any man who knows anything about the Islands will appreciate the fact that I must know something of the country about which I write. And the way I know is my adventure. It comprises a tale of sleepless nights in many nooks and corners of the world, of many cosmopolitan gatherings under the Line and below the Northern Lights, of long watches on land and sea. Here is a part of it:

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IN 1909 I was a raw rookie of seventeen. I was straight from a village flat, and all I knew of life was from books and magazines. I was impressionable, and I had a habit of listening with my mouth, eyes and ears when anybody talked. Of course I had the wanderlust. I shipped in the Marine Corps that Winter, and was sent to Mare Island, California. Thinking that all recruits would be like me, I got my first jolt at the recruit camp on the island.

I met men there from every conceivable outfit on earth except the colored cavalry. I couldn't begin to tell you about all of them, or a thousandth part of what they told me. I'll pick out one, a typical one.

HIS name is ——, and he is probably reading the Camp-Fire wherever he is, and perhaps he'll remember that open-mouthed rookie who used to listen to his tales. He was as horny as a toad. He had a chin like the *Wyoming*, and a mouth like a yard-stick. He was the ugliest man I had ever seen, but he was the cleanest and most soldierly. When he talked I always thought of the left side of a piano keyboard.

I was pushed into his tent one afternoon shortly after I arrived on the island. He was to be my bunkie. I sat down and stared at him. I felt a little homesick, and the first thing I asked him was where he lived. He leaned back and laughed like the winding of a clock. He made that noise for fully a minute, then his mood changed, and to my surprise he recited several verses of what I suppose was a song. One verse I have always remembered:

> My home it is the long blue line
> Where sky and ocean blend;
> My dream it is to have a home
> Where every cruise shall end.

Then, while I was making my bunk and cleaning my gear, he told me he had served in the British army in the Soudan, in India and in South Africa. Indeed, it was because of some stunt in the Boer War that he had got into trouble and decided to put the sea between him and His Majesty. He told me that he had served as a volunteer in Cuba and Porto Rico, and afterward as a regular in the Philippines.

IT SEEMS that he had been a rather high non-commissioned officer in the English army, and he delighted to tell of his experiences in the Soudan. He often told one story over and over again, because at one point in it the general in command, during a battle, called George to him, and:

"He says to me, 'George,' says he, 'you take a squad and attack from the flank.'"

BUT he told better and more believable tales of our own Islands. He was a great man for detail, and it was from him that I learned most of the customs of the natives. Night after night he would sit on his bunk, surrounded by younger recruits like myself, and then he'd hold forth. I have known him to talk for four hours and smoke up an inch of navy plug in doing so. I lost him at Mare Island, for he was transferred to Alaska before I was ready to go anywhere. I met him again in Charleston, S. C., and once in Colon, and once, only two years ago, I saw him walking up and down the Union Station platform in Washington. His mouth cracked when he saw me, and without any ceremony he opened up:

"Waiting here reminds me of once in Mindoro with Tony Turner."

DURING my four years I served on land and sea all along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. I cruised to Buenos Ayres and Bahia, to Rio Janeiro, Montevideo, Trinidad, St. Thomas and Vera Cruz, and in every port I always managed to find a group of leathernecks or flatfeet or doughboys swapping yarns of service, and I always listened.

I heard tales of Mindanao in Bahia Blanca, of Luzon in New York, of Palawan in Guantanamo, of Guam in Mare Island, of Mindoro in Norfolk, of Cebu in Charleston, of Honolulu in Boston. So if you read a story of mine you may think of me as having heard it over a string of glasses anywhere but where it actually happened. This story of "The Drunken God" I heard in a quarantine camp in the jungle of Guantanamo, Cuba. Don't understand me to mean that I heard this story in just the way I have written it—if I should write it the way I heard it I would have to found a magazine of my own in order to publish it.

I HOPE that this confession will not prejudice the readers who are interested in the Philippines. Though I have never seen the land of dobe dreams, every story I have written or will write about them has come from the lips of men who have spent years on at least one of the many islands, and they were not talking for publication.

EX-MARINES interested in the legislation being prepared, at this writing, for the organization of a Marine Corps Reserve can, by communicating with Captain Frank E. Evans, care of this magazine, receive information on details.

AS MANY of you know, in February Marjorie Sterrett of Brooklyn, thirteen years old, sent a dime to the New York *Tribune* "to help build a battleship for Uncle Sam." Marjorie added that she knew "a lot of other kids who would give their errand-money if you would start a fund."

The *Tribune* did start a fund and, in addition to giving the country a lesson in patriotism from the mouth of a babe, little Marjorie has started a movement that seems likely really to add a ship to the United States Navy, a ship that will be unique in the history of the world.

The *Tribune* has organized national machinery for collecting the needed amount, and money may be sent direct to the Marjorie Battleship Fund, care of the *Tribune*, New York City, or to any newspaper in your vicinity that is collecting for the same purpose. To each contributor the *Tribune* will send an appropriate button bearing the

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words "U. S. S. *America*," and probably the other papers will do the same.

Here is a chance to express your patriotism in a practical way. Send in a dime from each of your children and grandchildren if you have them, and add something.

LETTER-FRIENDS

Note—This is a service for those of our readers who want some one to write to. For adventurers afield who want a stay-at-home "letter bunkie," and for stay-at-homes, whether ex-adventurers or not, who wish to get into friendly touch with some one who is out "doing things." We publish names and addresses—the rest is up to you, and of course we assume no responsibility of any kind. Women not admitted.

(22) Edward Gutteridge, 710 Buchanan St., Amarillo, Tex., wants to hear from soldiers of civilization in Hawaii.

(23) Frank W. Ryan, 38 N. Maple Ave., East Orange, N. J.

(24) Saul Haas, 854 E. 167th St., New York.

(25) Chas. H. Johnston, Jr., 2036 Brown St., Philadelphia.

BACK ISSUES OF *ADVENTURE*

Four extra copies, April, 1911, Aug., 1913, Aug., 1914, Aug., 1915, 50c. postpaid.—H. E. RIESEBERG, Apt. 4, The Nebraska, 51 Randolph Place, N. W., Wash., D. C.

1915, complete. Express charges is all I want for same. Think all readers of *Adventure* should be glad at least to give their old copies without charge to help some one else enjoy a few minutes of good reading.—F. J. HEEGEL, 544 Hayes St., San Francisco.

Aug., 1914, to March, 1916, 10c. each, carriage collect. "I desire to pass a good thing along."—ED. S. RAHN, 1431 N. Allison St., Philadelphia.

WHAT Hays Bell—joins us with a story for the first time—has to tell us about Mexico is extremely interesting:

"Forget it!" tersely replied the Mexican officer with whom I was talking, to my objection that some atrociously illegal thing he contemplated doing was impossible. "Nowadays anything is possible. You tell me things 'can't be done,' yet they are being done this very minute. Revolution was started in Mexico to cut the 'nots' out of the 'cannots' which have afflicted us these many years."

Now doesn't that suggest to you a state of affairs which might breed adventure? Lest you hesitate, I'll answer for you—it does. I know. Just to live in Mexico City during the past five years was baiting adventure. To publish a daily newspaper there, as I have been doing, was—well, you might call it, "spitting on the bait."

A DOZEN armed men drill into your place of business and calmly tell you to get out as they have decided to confiscate the place; you are held up on the street at seven o'clock in the evening by two vagabond soldiers on the excuse of searching you for arms, and quickly and cleverly relieved of scarfpin and watch; while eating your breakfast in a quiet down-town cafeteria a battle starts in the street, with fighting so hot you can't get back to your office before mid-afternoon; you go to bed at night with the pleasant satisfaction of knowing 10,000 pesos in Villa money is in the safe—half a bale of beautifully engraved paper—then awaken in the morning to discover that the whole lot won't buy your breakfast—that it is a crime to have any of it in your possession even, since the Carranzistas have gained control of the capital city during the night; you—but why continue? Ask any one who has been down there recently and he will confirm my statement that the only things worth while left in Mexico are the wonderful climate and unlimited opportunity for adventure.

As I have said, you don't have to get into the newspaper business to meet adventure, but by so doing you can multiply the possibilities. In a country where governments change between suns—we had six changes of masters from January to July, 1915—but there, I'm off again.

AFTER graduating from a Western university I spent a few years in newspaper work in the United States, but abandoned the profession when an opportunity offered to engage in railroad construction in Mexico. That was back in 1906. It took less than a year to convince me I was not cut out to be that sort of empire builder. After I erected some piers for a bridge over the Amacuzac River down near the state of Guerrero, and nearly went broke on a railroad sub-contract in Jalisco, I joined some other foreigners in founding a Mexican daily newspaper in Mexico City. Don Porfirio Diaz ruled as czar then. His government was rough, but effective. W. J. Bryan would doubtless have disapproved many of the methods employed to maintain peace, but Diaz knew his country and people much better than W. J. For Mexico he developed the ideal system of government.

OUR newspaper had just begun to prosper nicely in 1910 when Madero's revolution happened along and precipitated the epidemic of disorders which has continued up to the present time. Financial difficulties overtook us and very soon our paper landed in the hands of the president's friends, who insisted that it support the administration. That is always ruinous to a Mexican publication. Since the people are always "agin" every government, they refuse to read an official organ. So I resigned to take on the management of the only English daily published in the capital. That was in January, 1913.

Just five weeks later, Felix Diaz, assisted by Generals Mondragon and Reyes sprung the "cuartelazo" against Madero. Later they were joined by General Huerta. After ten days of street fighting, Madero was overthrown and killed.

I COULD write pages on our adventures during those "Tragic Ten Days," as the Mexicans express it. With my wife I lived in the American colony, six blocks from the American Embassy, but that was no protection. Fighting was going on all around us. All day and nearly all night (with time out for meals) we heard the boom of the cannons. The revolutionists had entrenched themselves in the "Ciudadela," near the center of the city, and Madero's troops were trying to dislodge them. General Huerta was directing operations for Madero.

Only two blocks behind our house a six-gun battery had been stationed. Sharpshooters from the citadel would slip out and try to pot the men operating the big guns. No one can explain why, as not a shell out of the thousands fired by these cannons came anywhere near the mark. But it made things interesting for us. Since bullets were constantly hitting the upper story of the house, we slept downstairs on the dining-room floor, the only spot

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we could find where two thick walls were between us and the outside danger.

ONE night some of the Ciudadela men planted a machine-gun on the roof of the house just behind ours and at daylight the following morning opened fire on the battery. Sharpshooters from the Madero side replied, and for fifteen minutes we were in the center of one of the hottest little battles ever fought in Mexico. No soldiers were killed on either side, as far as we could learn, but half a dozen dead peons were picked up in the street near us after the row was over. Our house was fairly peppered.

On the last day of the fighting, when it was understood an armistice had been declared, I was walking with a friend toward the American Embassy. We were no more than two blocks from our destination when a sharpshooter belonging to one of the factions, who had been stationed in a convenient church-tower, took notice of us. His first bullet struck the cement sidewalk just between us, and the next clipped the stone wall as we darted around a corner.

A regular serial-adventure it was, just living in Mexico those ten days. Casualty figures show that the safest place of all was in one of the armies. Four thousand people were killed—and only one thousand of them were soldiers.

WHEN Uncle Sam's marines occupied Vera Cruz in April, 1914, another long chapter was added to our experiences. Tuesday morning the troops landed and captured the Mexican port. That same afternoon, excited by the extras put out with exaggerated accounts of the affair, a dozen different crowds were marching through the streets of the capital, clamoring for American blood. At eleven o'clock that night our newspaper building was attacked by a mob, which broke all the windows, but failed to gain entrance. Interesting threats were made as to what would happen to us if we tried to publish the following morning. We didn't try.

Wednesday noon I learned that a special train had been engaged to carry out the English and Germans who wished to leave, convinced that the United States and Mexico would declare war. That same afternoon I collected the American members of the staff and managed to secure accommodations on the special.

ALL through that night, on our way down to the coast, we could hear the Mexicans congregated at every station demanding Gringo gore, but with the exception of a few of the boys who had their pistols and money taken by a drunken sergeant at Esperanza, we won through to Soledad, only twenty miles from Vera Cruz.

Here we met our first difficulty. Alleging that two American newspaper correspondents had sneaked out of Vera Cruz the previous night to get information in the Mexican lines and had boarded our train, all Americans were ordered off to pass inspection. Since twelve newspaper men had come down on the train from Mexico City, we figured the officer couldn't help finding two men to suit his fancy. It's real funny now, but none of us laughed a bit about it then.

Once out of the train we were lined up and marched past a file of soldiers. Every passenger had to show his ticket-stub as proof that he had come from the city. Finally all were passed and released except four American railroad men, who had ridden down on passes. Orders were given to take them to the guardhouse.

WHILE no formal declaration had been made, the United States and Mexico were virtually at war. Feeling against Americans, never any too friendly, was running high just then, and Huerta's officials, apparently, were encouraging rather than attempting to curb it. Consequently these four railroad men were not slow in realizing the seriousness of their situation. After bidding tearful farewells to their families they were started up to the village under strong guard. At that moment an orderly came running up to the officer in charge with a telegram. Immediately after reading it the latter ordered his prisoners released, but refused to give a hint at explanation.

WE PUBLISHED our paper in Vera Cruz during the American occupation, from April 25 to August 1, 1914. In July Huerta gave up the unequal contest against the United States and left Mexico. Carbajal, who held the presidential job until Carranza could arrive, invited us back to Mexico City and we went. Hardly were we settled when Villa split with the First Chief, and revolution began anew. Carranza fled to Vera Cruz shortly, and Villa took charge in Mexico City for a few weeks. Obregon, Carranza's fighting general, then took it for a month, to be succeeded by the Zapatistas, and still later by the so-called "convention" government. In July the Carranzistas came back again under Pablo Gonzalez. He abandoned the capital after a few days, when reports said the enemy was approaching his rear, and the Zapatistas again took possession. With the exception of three hours, they held Mexico City the rest of the month.

I WANT to tell you about those three hours—because they saw one of the capital's quickest changes of government. I'm not sure, but I think it is nearly a record. It kept the town laughing for a week. Pablo Gonzalez had retired only a few miles and was actually holding the northeast corner of the city. One afternoon about three o'clock, some twenty of his men rode in, fully armed, on the street-car, marched down to the National Palace, drove out the Zapatistas in control, and ran up their own flag. Bells were rung in the cathedral just across the street (the usual announcement that a government has fallen), and for half an hour the horizon was clouded with fleeing followers of the great "Attila of the South," as Zapata's followers love to call him. The inhabitants of the city, following their common custom, prepared to change their slogan from "*Viva Zapata*" to "*Viva Carranza*," when the valorous twenty abruptly departed. Late that night the adherents of the southern chief came shamefacedly drifting back.

IT WAS during this kaleidoscopic government turn-over I had a most exciting little adventure. Reports that the Carranzistas were approaching in force had reached the office, so I drifted downtown to find out what was in the story. On my way I met one of the American secretaries of the Brazilian legation, in his automobile.

"Come along," he invited. "Let's go down and watch the government change."

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He said he had a straight tip. I thought we would have to go to the outskirts of the city, but he ventured the opinion that if we went to the Zocalo (the open square in front of the National Palace), we would have a good view.

That secretary was a well-informed young man. Through the center of the city we drove, where business was going on quite as usual, but as we entered the Zocalo the street ahead was blocked by a squad of mounted men, surrounded by an excited crowd.

"We'll have to go around and come in by another street," said my companion, stopping the machine. "That is, unless you think we can drive through them."

WE WERE debating the question, when I remarked that the crowd had broken up and that the soldiers were riding off. As we started ahead I noted that several of the latter had pistols in their hands, and were glancing back over their shoulders in our direction. Another moment and they were shooting, right at us, it seemed to me.

"Look behind!" yelled my friend, and I saw the cause of the trouble.

Those twenty venturesome Carranzistas had come into the Zocalo from the other side, behind us, and at once opened fire on the Zapatistas, who now were scurrying along ahead as fast as their ponies could gallop.

Thank heaven, my friend was cool under fire. Like a flash the thought occurred to me:

"Those Carranzistas, seeing us hurry after the mounted Zaps, will think we belong with them—take us for their leaders (every Mexican general now has at least one six-cylinder car) and pot at us." Pleasant thought. It was an embarrassingly suspicious position for two curiosity-bitten Americans.

Nearly three blocks we had to follow those fleeing Zapatistas through a storm of bullets from both parties before we could turn into an open side street and comparative safety. Every turn of the wheel I expected a bullet through the back of the car.

My watch would no doubt have said that those three blocks were covered in half as many minutes, but watches are such liars. I know it took us a week at least.

THESE are just samples of the little things that happen to one in Mexico, the kind that come uninvited. Once go hunting them and you will find enough to satiate the most avaricious appetite.

If one had access to consular and secret service reports at Washington he would be introduced to tales more distressing and terrible than ever haunted the imagination of a Poe.

Just as a Mexican's ideas of sport are represented by cock and bull fights, so his blood-thirsty desires demand peculiarly awful things in civil war. Politics, which is at the bottom of all revolutions, of course, is a mean little affair south of the Rio Grande. Treachery, knives, midnight executions, and a general disregard for the rights of the helpless, be they native or foreign, are the general rule. And the political intrigues, the circles within circles of wicked machinations!

NOW "Patrick Pegan Kelly, Headhunter," is no one, and at the same time a lot of men I have known in Mexico. His adventure was suggested to me by the remark of a friend of mine some years ago, to the effect that the only way to stamp out "Zapatismo" would be to kill the leader. Since even a limited amount of money fairly shouts in Mexico, he thought a fat reward would induce some one to go after Zapata, or tempt one of his ambitious subordinates, by enabling him to kill two birds with one stone. Then, a little over a year ago, a group of northern revolutionists near San Luis Potosi, captured a young Spanish bull-fighter. Just for fun they put him in a corral, armed with a saber, and made him fight three young bulls. But the Spaniard has been taught to work only with the assistance of his *cuadrilla*—capemen, *picadores*, and men to place the *banderillos*. So he made sorry work of it, and was badly battered up before the revolutionists cut off his cue and let him go.

A little adventure in Mexico may not be particularly unpleasant, but a lot of it is likely to be like a little knowledge.—HAYS BELL.

THROUGH Camp-Fire and letters we're serving you in many ways. Help *us* by not asking things already covered by our Information Directory. Before writing, glance through it.

DEFENSE? Get "Self-Helps for the Citizen Soldier," by Captains Moss and Stewart, U. S. A., $1.25, U. S. Infantry Ass'n, Wash., D. C., or Collegiate Press, Banta Pub. Co., Menasha, Wis.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care U S. Consul, Para, Brazil. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary. (Five cents postage in this case.)

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding.—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

For cabin-boat and small boat travel on the Mississippi and its tributaries, "The Cabin-Boat Primer," by Raymond S. Spears; A. R. Harding, Publisher, Columbus, O., $1.00.

National School Camp Ass'n; address its Sec'y, care *The Globe*, 75 Dey St., New York.

Red-Headed Regiment, address this magazine.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

AS A result of his researches into the field of buried and sunken treasure (embodied partly in the articles in recent numbers of *Adventure*, Stephen Allen Reynolds announces that an effort will be made at an early date to fit out a suitable craft to prosecute a systematic and scientific search for two or more pirate hoards which most unquestionably exist. By the use of modern methods and machinery it is hoped that substantial results may be shown within a period of six or eight months. A healthful cruise is guaranteed, as well as a sporting chance for big returns, and *immediate* application is desired for the following vacancies:

Two men with master's or mate's certificates
Two able seamen
Two ordinary seamen
One qualified surgeon
One electrician
One geologist
One machinist
Several able-bodied landsmen.

Applications must be accompanied by stamped and addressed envelope, and must give full particulars as to age, state of health, qualifications and willingness to do pick and shovel work and bear share of expense. It is proposed that all members of the expedition will share and share alike —the work, and the possible rewards—and if this notice meets the eye of any person willing but unable to go, there will be no objection to his financing some moneyless man otherwise eligible.

Applicants must be prepared to furnish references, to sail on short notice, and to sign articles for eight months. "Booze-fighters," young men under eighteen, and those merely curious, will please not answer.—Address for the next thirty days: STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS, care *Adventure*.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

TEN men to go with me on a trip to the Tibuson Islands to prospect for gold. Must be willing to stand your share of hardships and labor that we encounter.—Address W 312.

PARTNER would like to correspond with experienced mining engineer who could be interested in securing, by location, old Spanish mines in Mexico, west coast. I have examined the properties and can give full information.—Address WILLIAM BROCKWAY, Obispo 53, Havana, Cuba.

PARTNER to spend several months' vacation this year under very favorable conditions, probably in foothills of California, to build up robust health. Each party to pay his expenses. First-class references to be exchanged if desired. Absolutely no side issue to be taken up, except the one named; viz., physical culture under favorable conditions.—Address W 313.

PARTNER to travel overland by wagon and horseback to British Columbia, northern. Adventurer has full outfit, horses, etc. Must be educated man, age no object, but must have some cash to hold his end up. Start to be made from northern state Wyoming, this early Spring.—Address W. 317.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

KING, FRANK M. An all-round automobile man. Disappeared from Paris, Texas, last Summer. Probably somewhere in the Northwest. 150 lbs., 5 ft. 6 in., brown eyes and light complexion.—Address H. F. SHIVERS, 701 So. F St., Hugo, Okla.

WILL my friend who answered my ad which appeared in *Adventure* during the year 1913, please write me at once. I have lost your letters but still have your picture, standing in front of the cactus. You will recognize me by the capital W and arrow on the back of my letters.—Address JOHN L. WHITE, care Finlay Bros., Inc., Hartford.

THOMPSON, FRANK J., brother. Left Ventura, Cal., 1898, for Mexico. Last seen in McKittrick, 1912. Spanish descent, fair skin, blue eyes, dark hair, 36 yrs. His mother and sister are anxious to hear from him.—Address MISS ANITA THOMPSON, 876 East 46th Street, Los Angeles, Cal.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

TOBISEN, CHARLES J. Last heard of in Dodge City, Kansas, in 1901 or 1902. Any person having any knowledge of his whereabouts please notify me.—Address J. H. ISBISTER, P. O. Box 88, Fort Bayard, N. M.

CHALLENDER, CLAUDE, last seen with Clarence Mathis in Houston, Texas, 1910. Electrician from Atlantic City. Had uncle in fire department there.—Address BILLY BROWN, 709 Niagara St., Niagara Falls, N. Y.

CHAMBERLAIN, CARLYLE D. Was in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. Last heard from Seattle, Washington, with Dry Dock Co., February 28, 1915. Student, well versed in most lines. 6 ft., 155 lbs., 21 yrs., blue eyes, light hair.—Address ALBERT L. CHAMBERLAIN, Waverly Hills San., Valley Station, Ky. Canadian papers please copy.

TOWNSEND, HARRY S., last heard of somewhere in Montana in '94 or '95. Native of Wisconsin. Would like to hear from him or any one who knew of him.—Address GEORGE W. TOWNSEND, Ft. Screven, Ga.

HOWLETT, LEE. Expert rifle shot; camera man; gatling gun operator; Mexico, 1910; transit man with O. P. G. gang, Penna., New Jersey and New York, 1906-7. More excitement. Write.—Address CAPT. BOB CAVENDISH, care General Delivery, New York City.

ROMANDOVSKI, ELLIA VON (Baron Eugene Karl). Last known as member of Mexican Government Commission to Spain, 1910. Ex-cavalry officer and mining engineer. Fluent linguist. Age 33. Important news awaiting.—Address CASIMIR DE PADZIWELL, Liteiny Prospect, No. 9, Petrograd, Russia.

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SELLERS, EDWIN HENDERSON, cowboy and placer miner. Worked at Gila, Tombstone and Tucson, Arizona. Last heard from at Tombstone, Ariz., February, 1898. Brother will appreciate any information.—Address HENRY H. SELLERS, R. F. D. No. 1, Box No. 2A, Wilmington, N. C.

HOWARD, JOHN, scout in Montana during the Indian war after the massacre of Gen. Custer. Was at Fort Keogh as wagon boss, and later clerk in the quartermaster's office. Supposedly in Chicago in 1902 and '03. Last heard of California, 5th Inf. His sister-in-law inquires.—Address MRS. HAROLD BROWN, 665 West 4 North, Salt Lake City.

KIRKPATRICK, CLYDE M. ("Kirk"), last heard of in Aberdeen, Wash., 1914. Kindly write an old pal, one who failed with you in "Springs."—Address JOS. L. PETERS, 2320 N. Saginaw St., Flint, Mich.

PRUNTY, F. W., well-driller. Last heard of 1914, with Dutch outfit in East Indies, headed for Borneo. Was in Sonora and Sinoloa, '07, '08, '09. Later in oil fields, Bakersfield, Cal.—Address N. H. HOLMES, 46 West 49th St., New York City.

FAIRBANKS, FRANK G., heard from in Canada, Colombia, S. A., and finally in East Africa. 5 ft. 4 in.; 130 lbs.; dark hair, curled back in front; prominent nose; stands erect; about 27. Reward for information.—Address E. SMITH, Hartman, Cal.

COLE, CLYDE W., last heard from at the Hotel King, San Francisco. Left there for Los Angeles, July, 1915. Any one knowing his whereabouts kindly write his pal.—Address HARRY L. COLE, Stranahan Pk., Irondequoit, N. Y.

FLYNN, JAMES, uncle, who sailed from Newcastle on *Tyne* for New York, 1884. Coal miner. Information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address THOS. F. FLYNN, 131 Jefferson St., Petersburg, Va.

ROWE, THEODORE (Tessie), or Warren the 2nd, formerly "L" engineers, U. S. Army, '09 to '12. Write at once. Good thing in Juarez.—Address E. J. SWEENEY, Box 518, Texas City.

DRIEBEBBLES, JACK, formerly a sergeant in the U. S. army. Supposed to be somewhere in the South.—Address JEROME F. HOPWOOD, 856 Franklin Pl., Milwaukee, Wis.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SMITH, J. J., formerly with R. R. Club at Tucson, Ariz. Believe he is now with Constitutionalists in Southern Mexico. Important.—Address L. T. 314.

PETERS, W. MILTON, with D. U. W. in 1906. W. R. W. would like to hear from you.—Address L. T. 315.

WEYMAN, JACK. Old chum and partner of mine. Important information for him. Will he communicate with me?—Address EDWARD B. LORING, Norton, Kansas.

HERBERT, JACK. Would like to hear from him, or some one who knows of him.—Address GEORGE D. GROENEMAN, 1216 N. Weber, Colorado Springs, Colo.

SNYDER, WILLIAM, old school chum Dick wants your address. Last heard of in U. S. N.—Address DONALD THOMPSON, Morrow, Ohio.

BOYS who were with me on tug *Tatoosh*, 1911, time of rescue of S. S. *Washington*.—Address LAWRENCE PETERSON, 2816 Third Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

KENNEDY, FRANK, who was with me at the Naval Hospital at Los Anamas, Colo., Summer, 1913.—Address RICHARD (RED) O'CONNELL, 1063 Westside Avenue, Jersey City, N. J.

MAFFEI, HECK (CURLEY). Last heard of working in a "Fair" cigar store, Union Street, San Francisco.—Address V. WILDER, Gen. Del., Danville, Ill.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

ANY boys in the 4th or 36th Co., U. S. C. A. C., 1911 to 1913.—Address HAROLD WILTON, Box 292 Harrisonburg, Va.

G. A. M. Your partner of 1913-14 and part of '15 is very anxious to hear from you. I am going back across the border soon. Write.—Address Id. 312, care *Adventure*.

HARPER, JOHN, Fred Wickens and A. W. Watson, please write.—Address Captain George Ash.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the March or April issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

AMMANN, JOSEPH, Grand Is., Nebr., Feb., 1909; Avery, J. F., Ramseur, N. C.; Boulton, Frederick E.; Brown, Marion M., Portland, Me.; Brownell, Richard; Butler, Jack (Ormondi), of Philadelphia; Cain, G. W.; Carroll, Martin; Clough, Mr. and Mrs. Frank, British Honduras, 1910; Cumery, Bessie; Dawnie, George M., Philippines, 1904, battle of Macui; De Brenil, Aramand; Elliot, Robert (Bob); Ethridge, Mrs. Celia; Evans, Frank; Flewelling, Ernest; Gattey, Capt. G. G., 1901-'04; Hampton, Paul; Heyer, Milton Albert, Fargo, N. D., 1909; Hillman, Frank, Winnipeg, Can., 1911; Hines, Ralph or "Shorty Hines;" Hoffman, Frank L.; Holland, Frank; Jame, J. R.; Johnson, James Belton, St. Louis, Mo., 1868; Logue, Dan, St. Paul, Minn., 1910; Long, John Wesley, native of Canada; Lounsbury, Herbert Harley (alias Perter Sterling); McGuire, Thomas James; McKay, Raymond; McLaughlin, Dr. C. H. of Canton, O.; Marshall, Robert; Moore, Frank L., Seattle, Wash.; Morine, Col. Charles A.; Owen, G. P. Pickens, Osmer; Pinney, Bertie (or George Bert Pinney); Rider, Wm., Cpl. G Co., 41st U. S. Vol., 1900; Sharpe, Melburn (Curly); Smedegard, James; Starnes, Edwin G.; Summers, Thomas M.; Vinay, Julius, U. S. S. *Crocus*, Buffalo.

MISCELLANEOUS: Comrades A Co., American Insurrectos, 1900-11; comrades of the 17th B. T. A.; comrade B Co., 7th Inf., Jan. 15, 1897 to Oct. 27, 1898; served in Co. B, 19th Inf., Porto Rico, 1899, Elias James, Allegheny, Pa., John Kenny, Pittsburg, Pa., and Henry Miller, Detroit, Mich.; "Jew Sam" (last name forgotten); "Reckless, where are you?"

RANDOLPH H. ATKIN, Lawrence Stewart, S. N. Morgan, Christian A. Damm, George A. Blanchard, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 167, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207, L. T. 284, C 293. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to those features mentioned in our ad on page 2, the following stories are at present scheduled for the June issue of *Adventure*, out May 3rd.

THE HARP ON THE BARBED-WIRE FENCE — *William H. Hamby*
One of the most gripping tales we've ever given you. A love-story of the Ozarks and Kansas.

PETERSON AND FOREILLE (not Inc.) — *Hugh S. Fullerton*
A strong, entertaining story of the Great Lakes.

HOOTY COMES EAST — *William Dudley Pelley*
You know Hooty, son of the open West. He gives you an hour full of laughs, and springs some surprises.

PARADISE BEND—*Conclusion* — *William Patterson White*
If you've read the third instalment in the number now in your hands, we hardly need say the conclusion is a cyclone of action and thrills.

DERELICTS OF THE HILLS — *W. C. Tuttle*
The writer is a born humorist; this tale a corker.

THE COURAGE OF MR. CADY — *Ross Ellis*
A business story of a man who hadn't the nerve even to propose marriage.

PATHOS AND HUMOR OF WAR-TIME—*An Article* — *Gen. Ben J. Viljoen*
Being personal recollections of the Boer War.

BURNING MOUNTAIN — *Robert J. Pearsall*
Another forceful tale of American soldiers in the Far East, by a man who knows the service, and is at home with our boys in khaki.

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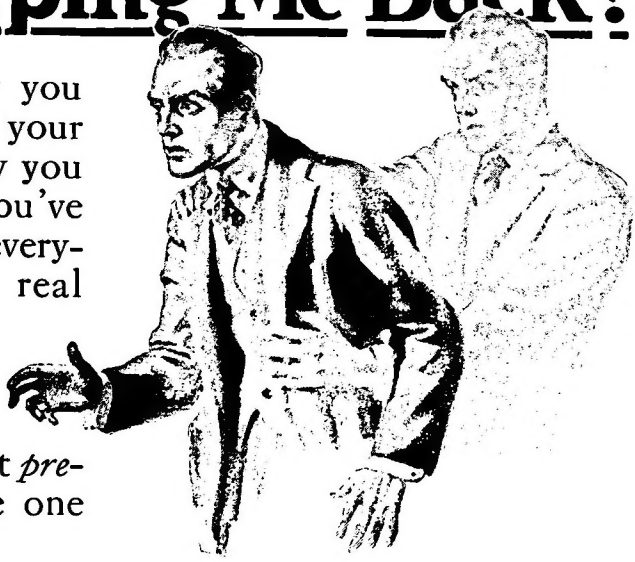
What's Keeping Me Back?



You've wondered why you don't get ahead. Why your pay isn't increased. Why you don't get promoted. You've blamed everything and everybody, when the only real drawback is *yourself.*

You're standing still because you lack *training.* Because you have not *prepared* yourself to do some one thing better than others.

If you really want to get ahead, and make up your mind that you're going to, the way is open to you.

For 25 years the International Correspondence Schools have been helping men to climb out of ordinary jobs into good paying positions. Nearly 5,000 reported last year that their I. C. S. training had won them advancement. The same opportunity that these men grasped is open to you. You can get I. C. S. training in your spare time in your own home without losing a day or a dollar from your present employment.

Position, power, good money, independence are within your reach. Will you let them slip by and stay on in the same old grind, or will you make the start right now for a bigger and better future? The I. C. S. are ready to help you be the man you want to be. Let them show you how. Mark and mail this coupon.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2003, Scranton, Pa.

Reports on 27,000 typical I. C. S. students show 14,990 now receiving $1500 a year or more; 2451 receiving $2500 or more; 413 receiving $5000 or more; 20 receiving $10,000 or more; and 8 with annual incomes of $25,000 or more.
WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE YOU CAN DO

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2003, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER	☐ SALESMANSHIP
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ ADVERTISING MAN
☐ Electric Car Running	☐ Window Trimmer
☐ Electric Wiring	☐ Show Card Writer
☐ Telephone Expert	☐ Outdoor Sign Painter
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER	☐ ILLUSTRATOR
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ DESIGNER
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ BOOKKEEPER
☐ Gas Engineer	☐ Stenographer and Typist
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER	☐ Cert. Public Accountant
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Railway Accountant
☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER	☐ Commercial Law
☐ Metallurgist or Prospector	☐ GOOD ENGLISH
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER	☐ Teacher
☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ ARCHITECT	☐ CIVIL SERVICE
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ AGRICULTURE
☐ Concrete Builder	☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Navigator ☐ Spanish
☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING	☐ Poultry Raising ☐ German
☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ AUTO RUNNING ☐ French
☐ CHEMIST	☐ Auto Repairing ☐ Italian

Name _____
Occupation & Employer _____
Street and No. _____
City _____ State _____

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How I Jumped from $1500 to $50,000 Yearly

"'Power of Will' Was My Guide"

"Three years ago I was making $1500 a year and working day and night. Today I make a thousand dollars a week and have time for other things as well. To the lessons in 'Power of Will' more than any other thing do I owe this sudden rise."

These are the exact words of an owner of "Power of Will." His name is not published for obvious reasons, but will be gladly given in confidence on request.

As remarkable as is his experience it might also be called typical of what this wonderful course in Will Training is doing for thousands of men and women in every walk of life who are using "Power of Will" as the stepping stone to greater accomplishment.

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